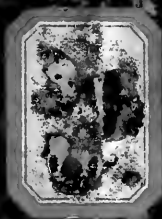


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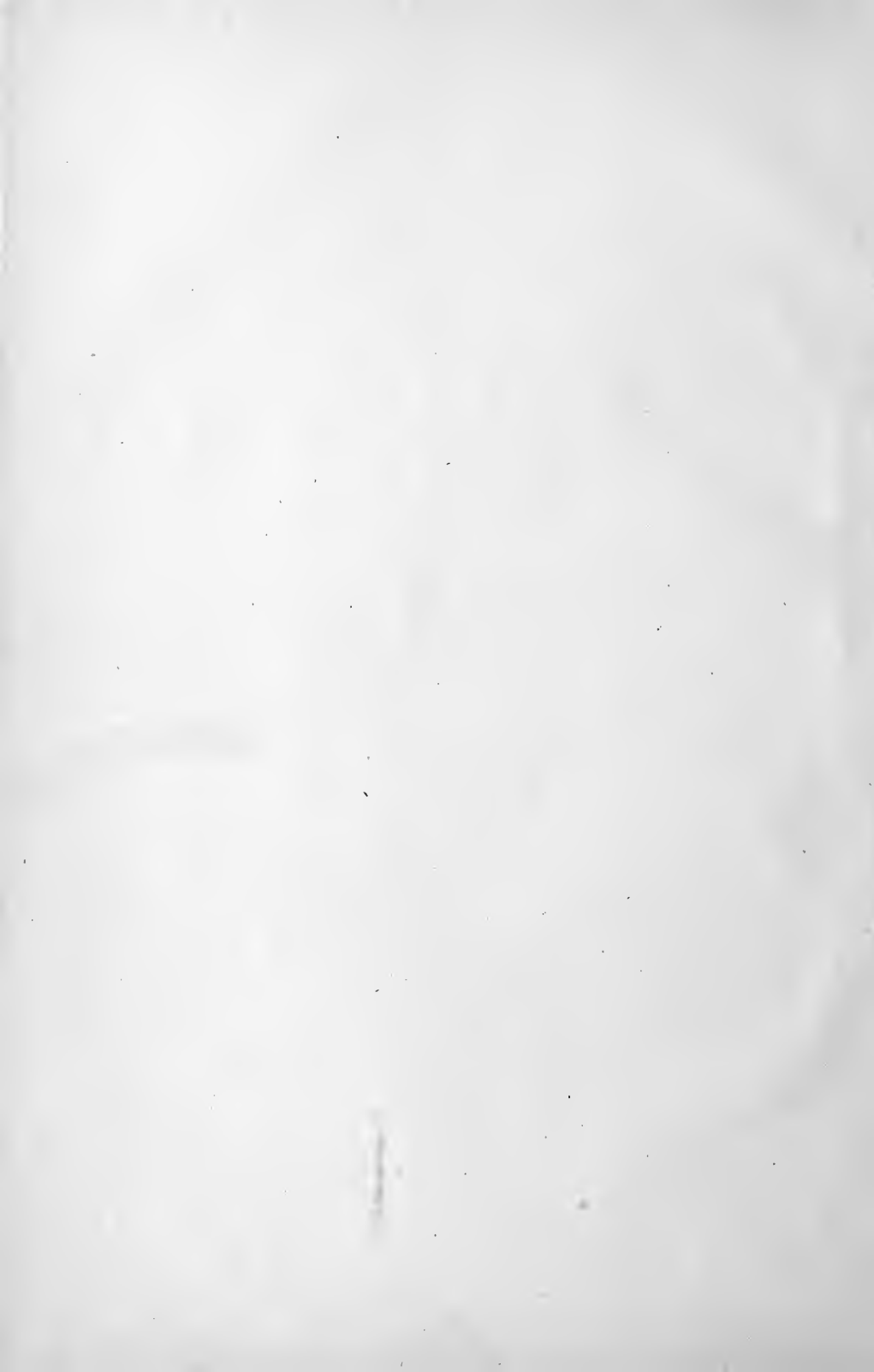
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# THE TOWNSHIP SYSTEM

349

OF

# SCHOOL GOVERNMENT

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OPINIONS OF THE  
STATE SUPERINTENDENTS  
OF WISCONSIN.

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COMPILED BY  
OLIVER E. WELLS.



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OFFICE OF STATE SUPERINTENDENT,  
MADISON, WIS., Dec. 22, 1894.

*To the Legislature of Wisconsin:*

Chapter 178, Laws of 1893, which appointed me a commissioner to prepare and submit, in the form of a bill, a proposed revision of the school law, provided that the bill should be accompanied by a report containing a statement of the reasons for any proposed changes.

In accordance with these provisions I have the honor to submit the following document, compiled from the reports of former state superintendents, setting forth the reasons for substituting the township unit of school government for the independent district system. That part of the bill which provides for the change is so far a new statute that it must be considered independently upon its merits. While retaining the essential features of the present township law it aims to secure a more complete and consistent system.

Changes in the laws relating to county superintendents, examinations and certificates, and free high schools, are indicated, with a brief statement of the reasons therefor.

OLIVER E. WELLS.



## INTRODUCTION.

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That the common school is the most important factor in our school system is a statement that needs no proof. It has been affirmed by all who have thought deeply on school problems. The proposal to substitute the town for the indefinite and irregular territory known as the school district as the unit of the system has received the approval of every state superintendent for thirty years. In the administration of school law these men, with singular unanimity, have come to feel that the obstacles that impede the progress and impair the usefulness of the wayside schools are insuperable. The school system, like every other function of administration, should be economically administered, but it must be remembered that the primal purpose in the establishment and maintenance of common schools is not to save money to the taxpayers but to extend the advantages of a common school education to every child in the state. To plant and maintain schools so that nobody shall be deprived of school privileges and the advantages shall be as equally and as widely distributed as possible is the purpose that ought to guide in the execution of the system. That districts will ever be formed or their boundaries readjusted with reference to the larger interests of the schools as a whole, or the convenience of individual pupils, under our present system, I do not believe.

Our present districts were organized as the exigencies of settlement seemed to demand. About these districts there has grown up a local feeling that resists their abolition where they have become wholly unnecessary and the readjustment of boundaries where they have ceased to accommodate their residents. Every proposition to effect either of these purposes is contested by warring factions each of which is eager to lengthen its own cords and to strengthen its own stakes. These

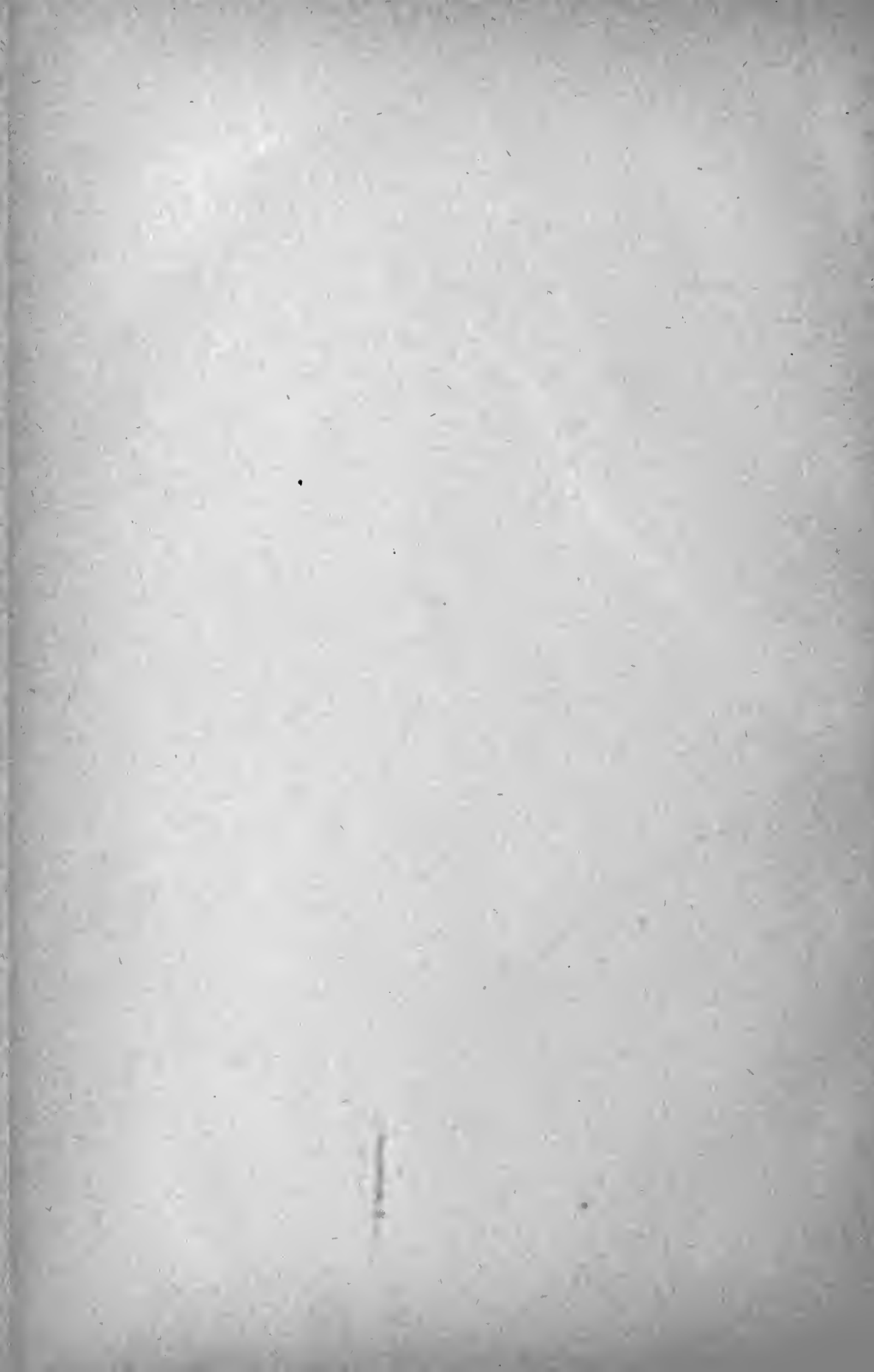
conflicts are seldom determined by the convenience of pupils but almost invariably the important question is, can the district afford to lose this source of taxation. Supervisors to whom these questions are referred are rarely chosen because of their knowledge of school affairs or on account of their supposed fitness to discharge the duties of school officers. Not unfrequently these officers refuse to readjust district boundaries while admitting the equity of the cases referred to them, and avow their unwillingness to incur the hostility of one or another of the contending parties.

Under our present law each district is required to maintain six months' school on penalty of losing its share in the bounty of the state. Under its operation one district in a town must do this on an assessed valuation of \$4,000 while another in the same town has an assessed valuation of \$140,000. It is not uncommon for the pro rata and the per capita tax to be ten times as great in one district as it is in another of the same town.

Now it is submitted that there are very few settled towns in the state that are not able, without oppressive taxation, to give the advantages of a common school education to every child in the town if the taxes can be borne equally and schoolhouses can be located so as to do the "greatest good to the greatest number." When the town bears the tax for the support of schools in common, those who occupy the poorer portions of the town will claim and in the main will secure equal advantages with those who live in the more prosperous portions. There would then be no purpose in denying to families the privilege of sending their children to the most accessible schoolhouse. Petty strifes and neighborhood dissensions would be less likely to control the action of boards representing the entire town.

Every superintendent for thirty years has taken office with the avowed purpose of improving the condition of the common schools and every superintendent has failed in his purpose. The fact remains that taken as a whole it is the judgment of those best acquainted with the administration of our system that the wayside school is not better today than it was thirty years ago. Every other school agency has been greatly im-

proved in that time. The fact that the common school has not improved is *prima facie* evidence that the system itself is defective. It is not claimed that the substitution of the town for the district will obviate all difficulties that beset the administration of our school system. No scheme of government is perfect. The scheme hereby submitted would doubtless reveal imperfections in its administration, but it has been submitted to the ablest teachers in the state and it is their unanimous judgment that its adoption and execution would be a long step in advance in the management of the most important factor of our school system, and the most potent element of our future well-being.



## THE TOWNSHIP SYSTEM OF HIGH SCHOOLS.

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### TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT.

(From the Annual Report of Lyman C. Draper, 1858.)

There is a revolution going on in our country regarding the division of townships into geographical districts. The district system has been so long in general use that the people are slow to discover its inequalities and inconveniences, and hesitate to make a change, even when convinced of a better arrangement. That the township system of school government has many and decided advantages over the old district plan, let facts and experience testify:

"As a general fact," says Horace Mann, in his Tenth Annual Report as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, "the schools of undistricted towns are greatly superior to those in districted towns;—and for obvious reasons. The first class of towns,—the undistricted,—provide all the schoolhouses, and, through the agency of the school committee, employ all the teachers. If one good schoolhouse is provided for any section of the town, all the other sections, having contributed their respective portions of the expense to erect the good house, will demand one equally good for themselves; and the equity of such a demand is so obvious that it cannot be resisted. If, on the other hand, each section were a separate district, and bound for the whole expense of a new house, if it should erect one, it would be tempted to continue an old house, long after it had ceased to be comfortable; and, indeed, as experience has too often and sadly proved, long after it has ceased to be tenable. So, too, in undistricted towns, we never see the painful, anti-republican contrast of one school, in one section, kept all the year round, by a teacher who receives a hundred dollars a month, while, in another section of the same town, the school is kept on the minimum principle, both as to time and price,

and, of course, yielding only a minimum amount of benefit,—to say nothing of probable and irremediable evils, that it may inflict. In regard to supervision, also, if the school committee are responsible for the condition of all the schools, they are constrained to visit all alike, to care for all alike, and as far as possible, to aim, in all, at the production of equal results; because any partiality or favoritism will be rebuked at the ballot-box. In undistricted towns, therefore, three grand conditions of a prosperous school,—viz., a good house, a good teacher, and vigilant superintendence,—are secured by motives which do not operate, or operate to a very limited extent, in districted towns. Under the non-districting system, it is obvious that each section of a town will demand at least an equal degree of accommodation in the house, of talent in the teacher, and of attention in the committee; and, should any selfish feelings be indulged, it is some consolation to reflect that they, too, will be harnessed to the car of improvement.

“I consider the law of 1789, authorizing towns to divide themselves into districts, the most unfortunate law, on the subject of common schools, ever enacted in the state. During the last few years, several towns have abolished their districts, and assumed the administration of their schools in the corporate capacity; and I learn, from the report of the school committees, and from other sources, that many other towns are contemplating the same reform.”

Speaking of Mr. Mann’s opinion of the unfortunate law of 1789, authorizing the division of towns into districts, Rev. Dr. Sears, Mr. Mann’s successor as secretary of the Massachusetts board of education, observes, in his report of 1850, “The justness of the above observation is illustrated every day by the evils which are forcing themselves upon the public attention from every quarter.”

Hon. H. H. Barney, in his report of 1855, as commissioner of common schools of Ohio, gives the following synopsis of the able argument of Dr. Sears, in favor of the township system, and the evils incident to the old district plan: After explaining at great length the nature of these evils, he sums up the whole matter by saying that the schools ordinarily maintained

in the districts into which they are divided are no longer capable of giving the education required by the character of the times; that they preclude the introduction of a system of proper gradation in the schools; that the classification of the pupils is necessarily imperfect, and the number of classes altogether too great for thorough instruction by a single teacher; the fact that the district schools without any of the advantages of gradation, once answered their purpose very well, does not prove that we need nothing better now; that the old system is much more expensive in proportion to what it accomplishes than the other; that by means of it hundreds of schools are kept in operation, which would otherwise be abandoned, as they ought to be; that in 1849 there were in Massachusetts 25 schools, whose highest average attendance was only five pupils; 205, whose highest average attendance was only ten; 546, in which it was only fifteen; 1,009, where it was only twenty; and 1,456, where it was only twenty-five; that most of these schools were of so low an order as not to deserve the name, and that the impression which they made upon the agents of the board of education while visiting them was that the money of the districts, and the time of the teachers and pupils were little better than wasted; that while some schools thus gradually dwindled into comparative insignificance and worthlessness, others became too large for suitable instruction by one teacher; that another evil almost invariably resulting from the division of the townships into independent school districts, was the unjust distinction which it occasioned in the character of the schools, and in the distribution of the school money; that when there was no responsible township school committee authorized to act in the name of the township, there could not be that equality in the schools which the law contemplated; that the inhabitants of one district, being more intelligent and public spirited than those of another, would have better schoolhouses, more competent, zealous and devoted school directors, and consequently better teachers and better schools; that the smaller and more retired districts, which stood in greatest need of good common schools, because entirely dependent on them, were more likely to languish for want of public spirit and good management than to be prosperous; that inasmuch as the theory of popular

education is founded upon the principle that the public security requires the education of all the citizens, and that it is both just and expedient to tax the property of the people for the education of all the children of the people, and inasmuch as the school tax is levied equally upon all parts of the township, and as the object contemplated, which alone justifies such taxation, is the education of the whole mass of the population, without distinction, nothing short of an equal provision for all should satisfy the public conscience.

With such facts and arguments presented and enforced, through a series of years, by two of the most accomplished and experienced friends of popular education in this country,—Horace Mann and Dr. Sears—gentlemen who have carefully observed, thoroughly studied and minutely noted the practical workings of the various school systems of this country and of Europe, the people became aroused at last to the importance of the change which had been so ably advocated, and the utility of which had been so completely demonstrated.

In a recent report of the secretary of the board of education of Massachusetts, the following important statement is found, viz.:

“A very considerable number of the townships have dropped the former mode of dividing the schools according to districts, and have placed the whole matter of their organization and distribution in the hands of the school committee of the township. This change has already been made in about sixty townships of the commonwealth, and the subject is now, more than ever before, engaging the attention of other townships, so that the year to come is likely to show greater results than any preceding year. The perceptible improvement of the schools in those places which have made the change is an argument before which nothing can stand, and which is now acting upon the minds of the people at large with silent but resistless power.

“The clear intelligence, steadiness and sobriety with which the people are beginning to pursue their object, as contrasted with the adventurous and uncertain efforts in the same direction in former years, is one of the many pleasing indications that the days of turmoil and confusion in settling great questions of school policy are passing away, and a wise regard for



the interests of posterity is becoming more and more controlling in the management of this branch of our public interests. It is hardly too much to say that, under the guidance of such lofty sentiments, all the townships of the state will, within a short period, be found adopting that policy in the management of their public schools, which experience shows to be the best.

"The gradual abandonment of the district system as here stated results in no small degree from its connection with another measure, which has been regarded by the people with great favor, namely, the gradation of the schools. The districts are known to stand directly in the way of this improvement, and are receiving judgment accordingly. It was not until somewhat recently that a subject so important, so fundamental as that of establishing schools of different grades, for pupils of different ages and attainments, received much consideration from those who alone possessed the power to make the change. Distinguished men had written on the subject, and those who had studied the philosophy of education were generally agreed in respect to it. But it was known chiefly as a theory passing, in only a few instances, except in the cities, from the closet to the schoolroom. By degrees the results of these few experiments became known. Measures were taken to communicate them to the people, the majority of whom were still without any definite information on the subject. From this time a course of action commenced in the townships which were favorably situated for trying the experiment and has been followed up with increasing vigor ever since.

"But what particularly distinguishes the present state of education amongst us from that of former times is the existence of so many free high schools. Until quite recently such schools were found only in a few large towns. The idea of a free education did not generally extend beyond that given in the ordinary district schools. All higher education was supposed to be a privilege which each individual should purchase at his own expense. But at length the great idea of providing by law for the education of the people in a higher grade of public schools prevailed. The results have been most happy. High schools have sprung up rapidly in all parts of the commonwealth; and

within the last six years the number has increased from scarcely more than a dozen to about eighty.

"The effect of this change in the school system, of this higher order of schools, in developing the intellect of the commonwealth, in opening channels of free communication between all the more flourishing towns of the state, and the colleges or schools of science, is just beginning to be observed. They discover the treasures of native intellect that lie hidden among the people; bringing those who are by nature destined to public service, to institutions suited to foster their talents; giving a new impulse to the colleges, not only by swelling the number of their students, but by raising the standard of excellence in them, and finally, giving to the public, with all the advantages of education, men who otherwise might have remained in obscurity, or have acted their part struggling with embarrassments and difficulties."

Hon. Geo. S. Boutwell, the present secretary of the board of education of Massachusetts, remarks in the Twentieth Annual Report: "In many districts the number of pupils is too small to constitute a good school. This evil was fully discussed by Dr. Sears, in the Sixteenth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board of Education. The evil, however, continues, without much alteration for the better; nor is there great hope of improvement while the present system remains. A district, however small it may be, is anxious to preserve its existence, and especially unwilling to be united with, or merged in a larger one. As the district provides its own house, the town is comparatively without interest in the matter, and therefore is slow to exercise its power. Hence the district for generations is allowed to continue a small school, comparatively valueless under the most favorable circumstances, in charge, probably, of a cheap, and necessarily incompetent teacher, in a house entirely unfit for the custody, to say nothing of the education of children. Now transfer the support of the school-houses to the town, and at once a general interest takes the place of local custom or prejudice, and small schools are abolished as far as is consistent with the public convenience, and the erection of one suitable house is likely to be followed by a

successful, because just, demand for equal accommodations for all."

A similar change from the old system to the new, is slowly progressing in Connecticut. Referring to an enactment authorizing and facilitating this change, the superintendent, in a recent report, remarks: "Among the objects proposed to be accomplished by this act are, to simplify the machinery of the system, by committing to the hands of one board of school officers what is now divided between three; to equalize the advantages of the schools, by abolishing the present district lines, and placing all the schools under one committee, thereby also facilitating the gradation of schools and the proper classification of scholars, and the establishment of schools of a higher grade in towns containing a sparse population, and substituting a simpler and more efficient organization."

Hon. Caleb Mills, when superintendent of public instruction of Indiana, declared in his report of 1855 that the township feature of the school law of that state was "one of the crowning excellences of the system." Hon. Henry C. Hickok, the superintendent of public instruction of Pennsylvania, remarked to me in conversation, "The crowning glory of the Pennsylvania school system, in addition to its county superintendency, is its new township plan of government, and the consequent avoidance of the ensmalling of districts."

- As Indiana has faithfully tried both systems, and is a sister state of the great northwest, I shall freely cite the results of its township experience, as contrasted with the old district plan:

"Under the old district system," says Hon. W. C. Larrabee, in his report as superintendent of public instruction in that state, in 1852, "heretofore in use in this state, and until lately in all the eastern states, serious inconveniences, and sometimes insurmountable difficulties could but exist. I myself came near being wholly cheated out of an education by this most injudicious and iniquitous system. The township was mapped off into districts by geographical lines. The district boundaries could not be passed. A family must send only to the school to which they might be geographically assigned, though a swamp or a river be in the way, though unluckily they might

live on the very frontiers of the district, and there might be in another district a schoolhouse provokingly near them.

"Under our present system these districts are utterly abolished. Each civil township forms a corporation for school purposes. The township trustees are authorized and required to establish, and conveniently locate in the township a sufficient number of schools for the education of all the children therein.' Each family may send to any school in the township most convenient or agreeable. Whenever any person can be more conveniently accommodated at the school of some adjoining township, or even in an adjoining county, than in his own township or county, he is at liberty to make his own selection and attend where he pleases.

"This repudiation of arbitrary district lines, and this liberty to the family of choosing a school according to its own convenience and pleasure, is one of the most admirable features of our system. It gives, wherever it has been put in practice, unbounded satisfaction. It only needs, in order to become universally popular, to be understood in its practical advantages. One of the committee who reported the law last winter, a gentleman whose services and experience in the cause of education render his opinions of great weight, thus writes to me of the operation of this principle in his own county: 'The people express much satisfaction at the provision of the new law, which enables them to make their own selection of schools unrestrained by geographical lines. A few days ago I met a farmer, whose name had by accident been omitted in our enumeration. I requested him to give me the number of his children, which he said he would do, as it might be of some advantage to us, although it was of no use to him. I asked him, why? He said the school in his own district was so remote, and the road so difficult, that he had altogether given up sending his children. I told him that districts no longer existed, that he could send his children, without charge, to any public school he might select. On this his countenance directly brightened up. 'Well,' said he, 'there is sense in that. I shall send my children tomorrow.' Another venerable man, nearly seventy years old, as he was paying his tax yesterday to the treasurer, said, 'I have been paying a heavy school tax for sev-

eral years and have derived no benefit therefrom.' I asked him, why? He answered, 'I reside in a remote part of the school district. It is utterly impracticable for me to send to our schoolhouse. There is a schoolhouse in an adjoining township close at hand, but I have no right to its privileges.' I told him that senseless obstacle had been removed under our new system. He could now send to school, if more convenient, in an adjoining township, or even in an adjoining county. 'Well,' said he, 'I shall hereafter derive some benefit from the school system.' Wherever this principle is understood by the people it is popular.

"In such a territory as ours, in many parts nearly roadless, and intersected by bridgeless streams, and in some of the northern counties obstructed in communication by impassable swamps, such a system is the only one promising any success. It is indeed strange that the people have so long submitted to the district system, so replete with inequalities, injustice and inconveniences and so deficient in redeeming qualities. So true it is, that we often remain, for a long time, unaware of the serious inconvenience and injury we suffer from imperfections and abuses to which we are accustomed. But when the remedy is discovered, and the corrective applied, we wonder how we could so long overlook so simple a remedy for so serious evils."

"Indiana," says Larrabee, in his report of 1853, "was the first state to abolish the old district system. But not the last. Ohio has followed in her footsteps. Massachusetts is preparing to follow, and in a few years the township system will be the rule, and the district system only the exception in more than half the states of the union. It is conceded on all hands that this system will, in the end, when fully developed, work out the most favorable results. It is the only system by which we can make any tolerable approach to equality in educational advantages for all parts of the state."

"Unequal burdens and unequal privileges," says Hon. Caleb Mills, of Indiana, in his report as superintendent of public instruction in January, 1857, "in the same township cease to vex and annoy. These sources of complaint and dissatisfaction will be dried up and these inseparable concomitants of the district feature will be numbered among the things that were and are

not. The superiority of the present over the former system, in the equity of its requisitions, is very striking and manifest. Under the former system districts in the same township, having an equal number of children, and consequently needing schoolhouses of similar size and accommodations, would be very unequally taxed to erect these structures. The property in one district would not be assessed for this purpose more than fifteen cents on the hundred dollars, while the wealth in the other must respond to the demand of not less than three times that amount. Is that right, equitable, and in accordance with the principle that demands equality of assessment for general interests and common benefits, in the same corporation? Should such a gross inequality of burdens be tolerated any longer? Should neighbors living in daily intercourse with each other be subject to such unrighteous levies? The present system protects us against all such inequitable assessments, and provides that each district shall have, at the common expense of the township, a comfortable, commodious and tasteful house, whose associations shall be pleasant and instructive. Such is the contrast, in reference to equality of burdens, presented by the past and present educational codes of Indiana.

"An inequality of privilege, equally gross and manifest, existed under the old district system, which disappears by the operation of the township principle. Districts of equal geographical area in the same corporation will often be exceedingly diverse in comparative population at different periods of their history. One may have twenty-five, another fifty, a third seventy-five, and a fourth one hundred pupils. On the district system the educational funds were necessarily distributed on the per capita basis. These funds, converted into tuition, would be represented by one, two, three or four months' instruction. Should friends, perhaps even brothers, living in the adjacent angles of the aforesaid districts, be subject to such an inequitable participation of a common patrimony? Should the children of these families be so equally cared for by her who claims the name and assumes to be their educational foster-mother? Such palpable injustice was the inevitable result, the legitimate sequence of the district system. Weak districts seemed only

the weaker by contrast with the adjacent strong ones. What could be more annoying to those thus situated in the same township, citizens of the minature republic, where we first begin to govern ourselves politically, where we first awakened those official aspirations which extend, perhaps, through a series of coveted elevations till they culminate in the presidency. It has existed, still exists, is deplored and lamented elsewhere. Our own experience attests the reality of the evil. Various prescriptions have been suggested for the disease, termed weak districts, by distinguished physicians, but the honor of discovering an effectual remedy for this wasting malady belongs to the Indiana faculty, who have nobly made it patent to the world. It is found in the 27th section of our revised school law, and reads thus: The schools in each township shall be taught an equal length of time, without regard to the diversity in the number of pupils in the several schools. It just meets the exigencies of the case, and will prove an effectual and permanent correction of the aforesaid evil. It is preeminently wise, just and honorable, for it secures an equitable participation of the educational provisions furnished by the state, as completely as human wisdom and sagacity could devise. It involves no injustice in the operation, for the commonwealth, pledged by her fundamental law to educate all her youth, as a wise and judicious parent, provides for the training of the twenty-five of one district, and the seventy-five of another, during an equal period of time. If she can give them only six months tuition annually, none, enjoying that amount of instruction, are wronged, because others, numerically less, receive a similar favor. It is not money that the state proposes to give her youths. It is something better, more enduring, and pertaining to both worlds, mental and moral culture. This she designs to distribute equally, and, by the aforesaid provision, effects as nearly as human ingenuity will admit."

Hon. H. H. Barney, in his report as commissioner of the common schools of Ohio, in 1855, remarks of the school law of that state of 1853, that it "constitutes each and every organized township in the state but one school district for all purposes connected with the general interests of education

in the township, and confides its management and control to a board of education. The law also contains provisions for introducing a system of graded schools in every city, town, incorporated village and township in the state. In accordance with the same principles, and for the purpose of accomplishing the same beneficent object, the legislature of Indiana, in 1852, enacted a school law abolishing all the school districts, and declaring each civil township in the several counties a township, for school purposes, and the trustees for such township, trustees for school purposes, and that the board of trustees shall take charge of the educational affairs of the township, employ teachers, establish and conveniently locate a sufficient number of schools for the education of the children therein, and that they may also establish graded schools, or such modifications of them as may be practicable.

"Whatever diversity of opinion may exist among educationists, as to the best manner of constituting township boards of education, there can be but one opinion as to the propriety of having a township school organization. Facts, experiments, the observations and opinions of those competent to judge, have fully settled the matter. It is not, however, so clearly determined whether the school committees or boards of education of townships should consist of three or six persons; one-third to be elected and the other third to go out of office annually; or whether they should be elected by the townships at large, or by the subdistricts. Nor is the principle fully settled, whether a township should be divided, for certain specific purposes, into subdistricts or not. But it is fully settled that if a township is thus divided, the lines of the subdistricts should not in the least interfere with the proper classification, gradation and supervision of its schools.

"It is thought by some that to provide the same amount of means and facilities for educating those who reside in the poorer and less populous portions of a township, as for those in the wealthier and more thickly settled portions, would deprive the latter of their rights; just as if the taxes for the support of schools were levied upon subdistricts, and not upon the state and townships.

"If all the property of the state and of the townships is



taxed alike for the purpose of educating the youth of the state, there is no principle plainer than that all should share equally, so far as practicable, in the benefits of the fund thus raised, whether they reside in sparse or populous neighborhoods."

I trust I have adduced an array of facts, experiences, and authorities that are well calculated to carry great weight with them. Suppose, then, the county superintendency, and county examining board, should be adopted, and the district system abolished, what would be the necessary township school officers? A town superintendent, a town school treasurer, and a town school clerk, would be sufficient, and would form the town board of education; at the first election, the clerk to be chosen for one year, the treasurer for two and the superintendent for three years, and thereafter each officer for three years, thus giving experience and stability to the board. They should have the entire control of the schoolhouses, their sites, erection, repairs, supply of fuel, etc.; should personally attend the examinations of the county examining board in their town, and acquaint themselves with the scholastic fitness and qualifications of the several teachers who should obtain certificates, so as to judge their respective adaptations to the several schools for which they would be employed, and to which assigned; and the town board should alone employ the teachers for all the schools of the town. They should also serve as overseers or inspectors of the schools, and unite with the county superintendent in his visitations of the schools of the town; and have the control of the township school library. They should make the annual report of the statistics and condition of the schools of the town to the county superintendent, and furnish any educational information desired of them by either the state or county superintendent. Appeals from their action should be the privilege of any person or persons aggrieved, to the county superintendent, if made within a reasonable time; and also from the action or decision of the county superintendent, to the state superintendent.

Such a system of township school government, with the

abrogation of the district system, would produce, among others, the following beneficial results, viz.:

1. The provision of the constitution of our state, which requires "the establishment of district schools as nearly uniform as practicable," would, by constituting the township as the district, be more fairly carried out; and hence the state school fund income would be much more equally distributed than it now is.

2. Taxation for school purposes would be better equalized, for, under the present district system, the people of some districts, owing to the smallness of both their numbers and taxable property, pay two or three times as much as their neighboring wealthier districts, and get no more—often much less in quantity and value, for it; and in joint districts, the several parts composing them, are, from the necessity of the case, very unequally taxed.

3. All the primary schools of the town would be held the same length of time, thus producing an equality of school privileges which does not, and cannot, exist under the old district plan; for instance are not wanting in our state, where the poor and weak district, with great difficulty, and heavy taxation, manages to maintain three months' school, and that kept by a cheap and perhaps almost worthless teacher; while the adjoining wealthy district, with comparatively light taxation, easily sustains a ten months' school, with an able and successful teacher. This is exceedingly unequal, and bears heavily and unjustly on the poor, and fails to carry out the heavenly injunction, "Bear ye one another's burdens."

4. By the township plan there would be a juster distribution and equalization of teachers, suitable to the several localities; and less of the favoritism practised, as under the present district system, in employing relatives to teach the schools—for in a town board of only three members, there would be less opportunity of practising it than by the present half a dozen to a dozen district boards in the town.

5. There would be more uniformity and adaptation in school-houses; for they would be built economically, by the lowest

and best bidder, and not, as is now too often the case, by one or more members of the district board, on pretty much his or their own terms; and such localities as now neglect to provide good, comfortable schoolhouses, would have them provided for them, and the children of such stingy, miserly souls would no longer suffer for a suitable place in which to acquire an education, which would be worth vastly more to them than all the wealth, without it, which their ignorant and niggardly parents could ever heap together.

6. It would not only be a far better, but a far cheaper system to maintain, lopping off the weak, inefficient and worthless schools, and dividing the larger and unwieldy ones; lessening the number of officers, as the town board of three officers would perform all the necessary school duties of the town, and do it cheaper and better than the half a dozen or more local boards of at least six times as many officers; and instead of selecting eighteen or more persons in a township, as is now the case, for these local boards, the people would select three of the very best and most efficient for the town board. Here would be a great saving of expense, and the objects sought more equally obtained, better in quality, and far more useful to the people.

7. By abrogating the district and joint district system, we should be doing away at once with one of the most fruitful sources of troubles, wranglings, contentions, and petty jealousies, incident to the district system; and would, at the same time, put an end to the greatest bane of the system, the constant ensmalling of districts, to gratify whims and caprices, and oftentimes to adjust an angry controversy, thus steadily lessening the ability of such dismembered districts to either employ a good teacher or maintain a school even the legal requirement of three months.

8. It would give to the people all over the state the perfect freedom, while taxed in their own town, to send their children to any public school, without regard to district, township, or county lines—thus, in the enlightened spirit of progressive legislation, doing away with an oppressive restriction already too long and too patiently borne by the people, which has

only been productive of inconvenience, injustice and inequality, and deprived many a worthy tax-paying family of invaluable school privileges.

9. And lastly, but not least in importance, while the primary schools generally cannot well be graded, and but little effected in the way of properly classifying the pupils; yet, under the township system, each town containing a specific number of inhabitants, or a certain amount of taxable property, or both, could have its central graded high school, free to all of a certain age, say between ten or twelve and twenty years of age—this central school to be kept in session at least ten months in each year. With such a graded school in each town, for the more advanced youth, the accruing benefits would be of so decided and general a character, that the plan could not but meet with universal favor.

## TOWNSHIP DISTRICT SYSTEM.

(From the Annual Report of J. L. Pickard, for the year 1863.)

For several years in succession the State Teachers' Association has discussed the subject of the Township District System of Schools. The wishes of the association are expressed in the report and resolutions given above.

The subjoined letter is presented as a petition to the legislature made through me by the committee of the association.

Horicon, December 12, 1863.

Hon. J. L. Pickard, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Wis.

The committee of the State Teachers' Association, on the "Revision of the School law," desire to call your attention to the following facts in regard to the introduction of the township system of common schools into our state.

You will allow us to state, (as of course you are aware,) that the state superintendents, yourself included, both in their public addresses, and reports, for the last eight years, unhesitatingly recommended the system. The State Teachers' Association, at most of its sessions for the last seven years, has unanimously adopted resolutions to the same effect. At Teachers' Institutes, and other educational gatherings, the subject has continually been discussed, and we think in every case with a like result.

Wherever the system has been adopted in the United States and Canadas we think that in no important case has it been rejected; but, on the contrary, is looked upon by educational classes as a most important and necessary step in educational advancement. We think that this accumulated evidence ought to inspire us with confidence to move forward; we think that the times are propitious, and especially that the association demands of us action. There are great improvements being made in the education of teacher, in the government, classification, gradation, and instruction of our schools, and in their visitation and examination, that seem necessarily to await and demand this improvement in our general school system.

As you, sir, by virtue of your office, and general influence,

necessarily occupy the most convenient approach to the legislature, and as we know your interest in the matter, we wish to act through you, and hereby cheerfully offer any aid in our power to further the cause.

Yours sincerely,

(Signed)

A. PICKETT,  
J. B. PRATT,  
CHAS. H. ALLEN,  
Committee of Association.

I take pleasure in presenting this matter to the candid consideration of your honorable body, and in support of its claims offer the following article prepared by my assistant, Mr A. J. Craig, who has given the matter much careful study, and most heartily indorse the argument he uses in favor of the system.

That the county superintendency is a step in advance, a great improvement upon the town superintendent system, is generally acknowledged by those best acquainted with the operation of both agencies; but many sincere friends of popular education regret the loss of the local officer, who when capable and faithful, effected so much in a direction in which the county superintendent is able to do but little—the visitation and supervision of schools; and, so much is this loss felt that, in certain localities, some are advocating a return of the former order of things, even at the sacrifice of the county superintendency. Believing that such a step would be a retrograde one, and that it is entirely unnecessary, I shall proceed to indicate what I conceive to be a better method of securing efficient local supervision of schools, without sacrificing the fruit of years of earnest effort, the county superintendency. We need not only efficient supervision, but a complete and harmonious system to supervise.

As our schools are organized at present, no system of supervision can be really effective in securing unity of plan, and systematic development of that plan in our educational work.

Each school district is a separate, independent republic, accountable to no higher authority, and dependent upon none, except in the matter of the examination of teachers, and the annual receipt and expenditure of a very small amount of

money. We call the aggregation of agencies through which we educate our children a school system, when, in point of fact, there is no vital legal connection between these separate agencies, and there is not a school established by law within the state. Not only is the kind of school, and the time it shall continue, dependent upon the vote of a majority of the residents of the district, but one more than half of the legal voters, a bare majority, can prevent the establishment of a school at all. Again, while in one district, in consequence of the intelligence and wealth of the people, a good, graded school may be maintained ten months each year, in an adjoining district, on account of the absence of intelligence, and the poverty of the people, a miserable apology for a school, in which only the simplest rudiments of an English education are taught, is maintained for three or four months only.

Now no system of supervision, be it ever so good, can remedy the above mentioned evils, and others inherent in our system. What we need is, the abolishment of the separate district system, and the establishment of the township system of school organization and government.

In this system each town constitutes a district, and all matters pertaining to the schools are under the direction of a board elected by the various subdistricts. The secretary of this board takes the place of the old town superintendent, visits and supervises the schools, grades them, assists the teachers in classifying the pupils, etc.; in a word, is the efficient agent of the town board, and the necessary connecting link between the county superintendent and the schools. Taxes for the support of schools would, under this system, be levied upon the town as a whole; and every individual would pay an equal share of such taxes in proportion to the amount of property owned by him.

Further details of the system will be given in connection with what follows. The advantages of this system are many and evident.

1. As each town forms a school district, and each parent would be permitted to send his children to the school which best accommodated them, all the expense, trouble and ill feel-

ing, consequent upon the frequent changes in the boundaries of districts, would be entirely avoided.

2. Schoolhouses would be built when and where they were needed. Many districts are now compelled to suffer, year after year, all the inconvenience and loss occasioned by the use of a small, badly constructed, ill-arranged house, because of difficulties concerning the site, or the indisposition of the voters to furnish the means to erect a new building. Under the township system these difficulties would be avoided, as the board, composed of delegates from all parts of the town, would not be likely to be influenced by local disputes in reference to the site for a house, but would locate it at such a point as would best accommodate those for whom it was selected; and as the funds for building the house would be drawn from the whole town, the tax upon each individual would be so small as not to be in the least burdensome, and there would be no necessity for delay.

3. Schools can be graded more easily under the township than under the separate district system. The districts, as now organized, as a general rule, are too feeble in numbers and wealth to maintain more than one department; and the law of 1858, permitting districts to unite for high school purposes has been entirely inoperative, no action having been taken by any district in accordance with its provisions. The summer schools, in the country especially, are primary schools in most respects, while the winter schools embrace all grades of pupils from the primary to the grammar or high school. This condition of things necessitates the employment of better educated, more experienced teachers during the winter term, at a cost for their services of about double the amount paid for the same length of time in the summer; while there is not, on an average, more than a dozen children in each district whose capacity, advancement, or range of studies demands a better or more costly teacher than the one employed during the summer: and thus the education of these few costs the district the difference between the wages paid in summer and winter, amounting, for a four months' school, to from thirty to sixty dollars. Now if there were, within the reach of the larger class of pupils in three or four districts, a school of a higher grade, to which



they could all have access, the winter school in their respective districts could be continued as a primary or intermediate school, under the charge of the same teacher employed in the summer; and one higher grade teacher would suffice for several districts. By this arrangement all the pupils in a town would be divided into two grades, at a cost for tuition not greater than now incurred; and the total additional expense would be measured by the cost of erecting a sufficient number of buildings to accommodate the higher grade of pupils. In many instances, by a proper arrangement of the terms of schools, the houses already erected would serve for both grades of pupils. In some district, in which the house is so situated as to be easy of access to the larger scholars in several surrounding districts, let there be a term of school commencing so soon as the ground is settled and the weather pleasant in the spring, and continuing to the first of July; and a fall term commencing about the middle of August and continuing till the middle of November, thus affording the primary pupils six months or more of uninterrupted school during the most pleasant season of the year, which would be far more beneficial to them, intellectually and physically, than the usual summer and winter terms, with the extremes of warm and cold weather, producing sickness, tardiness and irregularity of attendance, and thus wasting a good share of the money expended. The winter term could then be devoted entirely to the grammar or higher grade scholars, who, under a competent instructor, whose whole time was given to them and their studies, would make as much progress in one term as they now do, in the mixed schools, in two or more. Again, whenever a new schoolhouse is to be built, its location, size, and internal arrangements can all be adapted to the new order of things, so that, in process of time, without any violent changes, or any appreciable increase of expense, the facilities for maintaining graded schools can be established throughout the state.

4. Better supervision of the schools. The county superintendent, though exercising a general supervision over all the schools in his county is entirely unable to give, to each school, that personal attention necessary to obtain a complete knowledge

of its condition and wants; and some of the most active and efficient superintendents have felt the need of a local officer, to cooperate with and aid them in effecting improvements in the arrangement and management of the schools. As before stated, the secretary of the town board will be the proper person to have the immediate supervision of the schools, and will have power, under the direction of the board, to grade and arrange them, suggest and enforce rules for their management and government, and advise with and assist teachers in all cases in which advice and assistance are needed. He should be appointed by the board, and he may be one of their members, or not, so that the best person to fill the place is selected.

We should thus secure all the advantages of the town superintendent system without losing any of the benefits resulting from the establishment of the county superintendency.

5. Economy of administration. All the expenses now incurred in organizing new districts, and in changing the boundaries of old ones, would be saved. Each child being permitted to attend school which best accommodated him, and the amount of tax which each person would pay being the same, no matter in what sub-district he resided, there would be no reason for altering districts; consequently very few changes would be made, and those few would be easily effected, and attended with little or no expense. Again, the liability to a loss of moneys is in proportion to the number of hands through which they pass, and it is no wonder that, with nearly five thousand disbursing officers, there is a good deal of waste of district funds every year.

Under the township system the financial affairs of all the schools in a town being managed by the same board, one treasurer would be sufficient, and, in order not to multiply officers, the town treasurer, who now collects and receives all the school moneys belonging to his town, might be the treasurer of the board, and upon the order of its secretary, countersigned by the president, could pay out such moneys, when needed. Thus the number of disbursing officers would be reduced from nearly five thousand, to less than eight hundred, and besides the diminished liability to loss on account of the decrease in the number of disbursing officers, the expense incurred in executing

nearly two thousand treasurers' bonds each year would be saved.

6. Better accommodation of the people. Under the present system it is necessary to organize districts in such a form as to secure a certain amount of taxable property in order to support a school, and thus it often happens that a person resides in one district while the greater part of his property is situated in another; and many live in close proximity to houses to which they would be glad to send their children, but, because they live in a different district, they are obliged to send them to schools kept in houses remote from them, and difficult of access. Again, it often happens that a populous district, possesses a small, badly arranged house, while an adjoining district, with few scholars, has a large and convenient one; yet the children of the populous district cannot attend the school in the other one without the payment of a tuition fee, or a change in the boundaries of their district, involving time, expense, and often an appeal to the state superintendent. Under the township system this would all be changed, as it would be for the interest of every person to have the number of pupils in each school proportioned to the size of the house, and its power to accommodate them.

There would also be an equality of privileges in the different districts, as, the schools being supported by a general tax, justice would require that they be maintained an equal length of time throughout the town, and we should not see, as we now do, so great a disparity in school privileges in adjoining districts.

Free schools are founded upon the principle that it is the duty of the state to see that the children within its limits are educated. To this end, a generous public fund is provided, and the people are yearly taxed to support the system; yet the kind and amount of instruction given to children of different districts depend entirely upon influences which the law does not seek to guide or control. Now common sense and justice demand, that wherever children enough to organize a school are found, one should be established, with all the means and appliances necessary to secure the result desired, the proper education of the children attending it.

7. Employment of teachers. It being the special duty of the secretary of the town board to visit the schools, become acquainted with their condition and wants, the capacity, tact and success of the different teachers, he would be better qualified to select the person suited to each school than nine-tenths of the district clerks under the present system possibly can be; thus better teachers would be employed—that is, teachers better adapted to their positions—and they would not be changed each term, as they now are, but would remain in one school so long as they were successful in their work.

Incompetent and unsuccessful teachers would be sifted out, the standard of attainments of all those employed would be gradually and surely raised, and consequent progress of the schools would be certain and uninterrupted.

The new system of examination by the county superintendent has done much to elevate the standard of attainments, and weed out unsuccessful teachers, but, inasmuch as an examination in regard to scholarship is not always a true test of the qualifications of an applicant, and as it is not possible for the county superintendent to give that personal attention to each school necessary to enable him to judge correctly in regard to the skill and faithfulness of the teacher, many persons are still employed who have no real fitness for their position, and who are retained through favoritism or indifference on the part of those by whom they are engaged. Such persons would be quietly dropped from the list of teachers, and would engage in other pursuits, or, by the use of proper means, become fitted for the responsible positions of instructors of youth.

I have thus presented some of the main points in which it is believed that the township system is superior to the present district system, and it only remains to notice some of the objections urged to it by those who object to change, or who are satisfied with the system as it is.

The first objection is to the raising of taxes for the support of schools by the town at large. Looking at the matter from a personal standpoint, many think a general tax would be unjust to different localities, for the reason that the children of school age are not proportioned to the valuation of property, and thus a wealthy district, with few children, would pay

for the education of children residing in other districts. This objection is the same one so often urged against free schools by the childless capitalist, the wealthy tax-payer whose children were already educated, "I ought not to pay for educating my neighbor's children." As before stated, free schools are established on the assumption that "the property of the state shall educate the children of the state," and consistency requires that the details of the system shall be so arranged as to carry out this fundamental principle. What justice is there in requiring that a specified portion of territory shall furnish the means to educate the children residing therein, so long as you withhold from its tax-payers the power to decide who shall inhabit that territory?

The fact is, that the fairest method of maintaining the schools would be by a tax upon the whole state, and the larger the district embraced in one organization, the more just and equal will be the taxation.

The moneys apportioned yearly by the state superintendent, and those levied upon the towns by the county board of supervisors, are distributed to each district in proportion to the number of children between the ages of four and twenty residing therein; and as the latter moneys are raised by a tax upon each town as a whole, and not by separate districts, the plan advocated is, in fact, in operation already, and only needs to be extended to the levy and collection of all the funds needed to support the schools.

In the second place, many will object to the raising of funds by the whole town, to build a schoolhouse in a particular district, who would be willing that the schools should be supported by a general tax, after the houses are built. This objection is removed by considering the town as a single district, which needs several houses to accommodate its pupils. It is true, that, for convenience sake, the town is divided into sub-districts, yet, for general purposes it is a unit, and should be managed accordingly. Each town is divided into road districts, yet when a new highway is to be laid out, the whole town is called upon to pay the expense incurred for right of way, etc., though but few of its tax-payers are personally benefited; and, when a bridge is to be built, no one thinks of ask-

ing the citizens residing in the road district in which the bridge is needed, to furnish the funds to pay for erecting it; and it cannot be that the education of the children in Wisconsin, is a matter of less interest to the people than the laying out of highways, and the erection of bridges. Returns made to the state superintendent show that, on an average, in the larger counties, not more than four schoolhouses are built in each year; and this would give to each town but one to build every three years, and this burden, being borne by all the taxpayers, would be so light, as scarcely to be felt. All the children would thus be provided with school privileges, and the protracted effort and struggle now necessary in most districts, in order to secure the erection of a schoolhouse would be avoided.

In order to avoid all seeming injustice, it might be provided that those districts which had, within a certain limited time, erected good and substantial houses, should be exempted from the payment of the taxes raised for building houses, for a number of years after the adoption of the township system.

All other inequalities and seeming irregularities can be as well provided for, and it is confidently believed, that a law can be framed, preserving for our school system all its prominent vital and valuable features, and engrafting thereon such additional ones as will give it harmony and completeness, make it a better exponent of our educational standing, more worthy of affection and generous support, and insure the successful accomplishment of its great design, the education and elevation of the whole people.

## TOWN ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOLS.

(From the Annual Report of State Superintendent John G. McMynn—For year ending August 31, 1864.)

That the present independent local district system is not satisfactory to those most interested in a successful administration of our educational affairs is, so true as to be generally admitted. Were it not true that the success of any system depends more upon the intelligence and energy of its agents than upon the press under our present school organization. Still, it is not wise to argue that, because a system that is theoretically bad may be so wisely administered as to be productive of good, it therefore is unwise to change it for a better.

The defects of our present school district system are radical, and, without a change, irremediable. The experience of the American people in the management of public affairs has demonstrated the town to be the true unit. To a certain extent this unit is recognized in our system. Town boards of supervisors have power to divide their respective towns into schools districts, in such manner as they may deem proper. They may alter boundaries of districts; annex a part of one to another, unite several into one, or divide one into several. Their authority is limited only by the right of appeal to the department of public instruction. They divide funds and property in case districts are annulled; and thus, in several respects, we have the town district system in operation in our state.

Instead, however, of carrying out this principle, and providing a town school board to manage the affairs, we have created from three to ten other boards in each of the towns, to which the management of the schools is entrusted. Each of these district boards has power:

1. To establish and keep in operation, for at least five months during the year, such schools as may be required to accommodate children over four and under twenty years of age, in their district.

2. When authorized by a vote of the district, to purchase or lease schoolhouse sites, to purchase or build schoolhouses, and to keep them in repair.

3. To expend the money belonging to the district and to keep an account of receipts and disbursements.

4. To adopt and enforce all needful rules and regulations for the government and management of their school.

5. To employ teachers and fix the amount of their compensation.

6. To adopt text-books, designate the course of study and to visit and examine the school.

7. To provide fuel, furniture, apparatus and whatever is necessary to the good of the school.

These and other duties imposed upon district boards by law, show that they are charged with the most important interests of the people. Their duties are difficult, demanding for their proper discharge, high character, general intelligence, broad views, solid judgment, public spirit, integrity and refinement. The first thing that strikes the mind in examining our present system in the light of these facts, is the difficulty of finding men to act as school officers who possess the necessary qualifications. Under existing arrangements this is practically impossible. The present system requires too many officers. If we assume five as the average number of districts in each town of the state, we have, counting the town supervisors and the town clerk, nineteen school officers for each town or more than fifteen thousand in all. We have, then, one school officer for every twenty-five children over four and under twenty years of age. It would seem that such a reduplication of offices is entirely needless. It certainly seems to be in direct conflict with the usual methods of doing business. It will not stand the test of common sense. Nineteen officers to manage any other branch of public business for a town would be declared to be at least three times as many as necessary. Every man knows that one third the number would manage the educational affairs of a town three times as well.

Hon. Newton Bateman, superintendent of public instruction



of Illinois, in his sixth biennial report, speaking of the high qualifications needed in school officers, says:

"Are nineteen such men to be obtained for these positions in every township of Illinois? It is idle to think of it. If there are five the state is rich indeed. I do not know how many there are; but this we know, that in every township, as in every community, there is among the citizens a graduated scale of competency and excellence, descending from the best down to the worst; and that, beginning at the top, the fewer we take for our committee, or board, the better will be its average quality. A township that cannot furnish nineteen men fit for school officers, might furnish five. Or if the five, even, are not what they should be, it is still self-evident that their average fitness will be greater than when diluted by the accession of fourteen more, each and all of whom are inferior to any one of the five.

"The pernicious consequences incident to the defect of our local system may all be epitomized by the statement that it necessitates the elevation to the important offices of trustees and directors, of many indifferent and incompetent men; of men who either care little for common schools, or who have not the knowledge or ability to do much for them. It clogs, encumbers, and deadens the system, dragging in its train the evils of misjudgment, mismanagement, inefficiency and demoralization. And there is no remedy, without a radical change of plan."

But our present system requires not only a needless number of officers, but it also requires a corresponding number of public meetings and elections. These involve time and expenses of various kinds that may in part be estimated, but, they give rise to difficulties, that, in hundreds of instances, completely cripple the public schools, and the loss arising from which cannot be told.

The able report from which I have just quoted, presents this point with such force, and it so well describes the experience of this department, that I beg to call attention to the following extract:

"The effect of this state of things hardly needs to be described. In the first place it makes an unreasonable demand upon the time of the people, to attend so many elections and meetings for voting purposes. A great majority of the voters

are farmers and mechanics, and persons engaged in other industrial pursuits, who can ill afford to leave their work so many days every year, in addition to the time spent at the numerous general elections, state, county and town. They feel it vexatious and harassing to have to quit their private business and pursuits so often for such purposes. It has a tendency to make them sour and unfriendly towards the whole system, to be dragged so frequently to the polls, and to be compelled to mingle in scenes for which most of them have no relish.

"It must be noted, too, that the time necessarily spent in attending the meetings and voting, is often but a small part of that lost in connection with these frequent elections. In proportion to the increase of such local voting conventions, is the number and acrimony of neighborhood disputes and quarrels. Parties are formed, and rivalries and jealousies are engendered, often as bitter and virulent as those which rage on wider fields of action, and in more important contests. Indeed, it often seems to me that the spirit of feud and faction is hottest and most implacable, in proportion to the fewness of belligerents, and the nothingness of the matter in dispute. Certainly, I never wish to deal with contestants more rancorous, in contests more trivial, than have arisen out of differences of opinion among the inhabitants of school districts. But the point is, that the consideration necessary to form a right judgment concerning the many questions to be voted on, and especially the numerous conferences, excited disputations and pertinacious efforts put forth to carry a pet measure or defeat an opponent, consume far more time than that actually spent in voting; so that the objection to so many elections on the score of the time required and involved, is really one of no small importance.

"It follows, in the second place that many of these elections are attended by a mere handful of persons; that others go by default—and that in a still greater number, the business is done in a very careless and hasty manner. It is rare indeed that one-half of the qualified voters of a school district are present at the elections; not seldom there are barely enough to organize; while in many instances, every year, and from year to year, the day of election comes and goes, unnoticed and unregarded.

"But the most serious evils resulting from so many petty elections, so scantily attended and hurriedly conducted, are the ill-advised measures adopted; the incompetent men elected; and the endless wranglings and controversies growing out of the irregular and illegal manner in which the elections are man-

aged and the returns made. Summoned from their industrial pursuits upon what many of them consider very trivial business, the inhabitants hurry to the place of meeting, in no amiable mood, and hurry through the work in hand, in a mechanical and indifferent sort of way, intent only upon hurrying back home again as fast as possible. Of course, the worst things are liable to be done, and the best things to be left undone. The most unfortunate sites are liable to be selected for school-houses, the most unsuitable building plans to be adopted, and wrong action to be taken in respect to taxation, extension of schools, and other questions of vital moment to the educational prosperity of the district. Or, if the meeting is for the election of officers, the same causes operate to endanger the defeat of the best men in the district. Indifference, or the pressure of business, keeps away those who would favor good teachers, good schools and liberal educational endowments; while those, if any, who are opposed to each and all of these things, muster at the polls in full force. Once in office, down goes a school policy which it may have taken years to build up, and which it will require years more to re-establish.

"Then, too, the proceedings are seldom conducted in all respects according to law. This occurs not only on account of indifference or haste, but quite as much from our complex statutory provisions in regard to elections, a proper knowledge of which cannot reasonably be expected of the majority of those who are compelled to act as officers of school district elections. The irregularities vary to almost every conceivable degree; from those of so vital a nature as really to make the election void, to those too trivial for serious notice.

"Perhaps the notices were not posted up; or there were not enough of them; or they were not put in the right places; or they were not issued long enough beforehand; or they were not signed by the right persons, or by enough persons, or were not signed at all; or the time of opening and closing the polls was not stated; or if stated, the time was too early or too late, too long or too short, or in the evening when it should have been in the day; or an improper place was designated for the meeting, such as a certain private house, barn, cornfield, grove, or woodpile, instead of the schoolhouse; or the election was ordered on a wrong day of the week; \* \* \* or the voting was viva voce instead of by ballot; \* \* \* or the candidate was ineligible; or the voters' names were not registered; \* \* \* or questions were voted on which were not announced in the call; or the clerk kept his records in pencil, or did not record them at all, or carried them off in his hat and lost them.

\* \* \* Upon the defeat of a favorite candidate or measure, the search for flaws in the election commences, and upon the discovery of one or more of those mentioned, (no difficult task it would seem,) an attempt is immediately made to prove that the election was void, or to break down the business action of the meeting, and such attempts often result in expensive litigation, angry feelings, and permanent mutual alienation.

"If the tone of these remarks should seem like trifling, I beg to say that I speak but the simple truth. My official correspondence is burdened with such things, however preposterous, and the letters are all answered, with the seriousness and candor to which the earnestness and good faith of the writers entitle them. I am not to be understood, of course, as characterizing in the foregoing manner all local school elections, or even a considerable fraction of them, but I do say that the tendency of such multitudinous district elections is bad and that continually."

Without discussing the difficulties growing out of the instability of district boundaries, the multiplication of districts, and the want of provision for transferring pupils from one district to another, let us consider the subject of grading and classification.

The merits of graded schools need not be argued. Their superiority in economy and efficiency is admitted. Now, there is no difficulty in applying this principle to our country schools. Abolish the present district boundaries, except so far as they may be used to aid in the establishment of primary, grammar and high schools, and, with a township organization, we have the same system that in our cities and larger villages is found to be so much superior to the independent district system. We are not only unable to secure gradation of the schools under existing arrangements, but classification also is practically impossible in the majority of them.

The average number of scholars in the public schools in the agricultural districts is not more than thirty-five. The number of branches required to be taught is at least six. Here are six classes to start with, or an average of about six pupils to a class. But there must be classes to correspond with the attainments of the scholars. This will require that there should be at least three in spelling, three in reading, two in writing, three in English grammar, two in geography and three in arithmetic or fifteen in all. If history of the United States is

taught, and if other branches are required, we have from one to five classes more. But with fifteen classes reciting, each once a day, and allowing one hour for recesses, we find that twenty minutes a day is all the time that can be allowed for the instruction and drill of each class. But this estimate is too favorable. The truth is that the time-table of many of the schools will show that not more than ten minutes can be allowed to each class for explanatory illustration and testing the pupil's knowledge of the subject.

Superintendent Bateman, discussing the subject says:

"Bounded by district lines which effectually prevent any comprehensive plan of co-operation by which the schools of the township can be graded, and each child be allowed to attend that school which is nearest, or which is, all things considered, the best for him, and by which alone the true end and best results of common schools can be realized; hampered by transfer restrictions, which, though necessary under the existing arrangement, are nevertheless, subject to such contingencies of indifference or caprice, or captiousness, as to cut off, to a great extent, the very privileges they were intended to secure with a limited territory, limited means, and a scanty number of pupils; each district is left to make its way as best it can, in isolation and weakness. In nine cases out of ten, there is in each rural district but one schoolhouse, one teacher, and one school. The first has generally but one room, is too small, poorly ventilated, imperfectly furnished, and, of necessity, destitute of the best modern improvements; the second is such as the scanty means and divided counsels of the districts will enable it to secure; and the third is what the preceding conditions must inevitably make it.

"Into that one room, and to the care of that one teacher, press all the school-going children of the district. All ages, and both sexes are there; from the brave little fellow with his primer, intent upon the mysteries of the alphabet, to the lads and misses who are ready to grapple with analysis and fractions and roots, while one and another comes with a request from father or mother to be allowed to study book-keeping, or natural philosophy or algebra, or the Latin grammar. What, I repeat, can the teacher do? The number of scholars, with the diversity of their attainments, ranging from the merest rudiments to the most advanced, added to the number of studies either required or desired to be taught, sets at defiance all attempts at classification. Is it not lamentable to see an otherwise magnificent system of public instruction thus shorn

of its strength at the vital point where the school is organized and the teaching performed?"

The adoption of the town system of school organization was recommended by my predecessor, in his annual report for 1863, and its many advantages over the local district system were pointed out. He showed that under it we can secure that supervision of the schools we need; that taxation will be more equitable; that the ill feeling consequent upon changes in district boundaries will cease to arise; that schoolhouses will be built when and where they are needed, and taxes for their erection will be less burdensome; that schools can be properly graded; that teachers qualified for the different grades can be employed; that the system will be more economical than the present one; that the schools will be more uniform in the length of time they are taught during the year; that incompetent teachers will be sifted out, and that those employed will secure more permanent positions.

The state superintendent of Pennsylvania, after a trial of this system, says:

"By our system, a township, borough or city is a school district. In very large cities there may be two or more districts, but the boards must be united for managing the schools in one organization, under the name of a board of control. The secretary who is ex-officio district superintendent, visits the schools monthly, and reports to the board, and transacts all the minor business of the board, and is paid such compensation as the board shall think proper. The chief advantages of our township system are the facilities afforded for grading the schools wherever it is practicable, the simplicity of reporting to the state department, which it affords, the ease with which uniformity of text-books can be secured, the means which it affords for securing a superintendent of each district, and the systematic visiting and reporting the condition of the schools to the board, and the ease with which each board may be communicated with and reached, through the official department of the State Journal, which is made a state organ, and sent to the secretary of each board at the public expense. In a population of three millions we have only about 1,700 boards of directors. We should have not more than 1,500; but we were vexed with a few independent districts which should never have been allowed, by which the number is increased."

We believe that no objection can be made to this system which cannot be easily answered and removed. All the essen-

tial principles of our present law would remain. It would simplify our school machinery, and would easily adapt itself to our educational wants and habits. Some of the immediate benefits of the town organization would be,

1. To secure in each town as many schools as there are now districts, and more or less as may be found best; all of them, however, so organized as to be parts of a system adapted to the special wants of the community.

2. To end disputes about district boundaries.

3. To dispense with a large number of school officers, and to reduce largely the number of school elections.

4. To provide for each child going to that school which is most convenient and beneficial to him, considering his attainments and the studies he is pursuing.

5. To diminish the aggregate expenses of the schools, and to establish a uniform rate of taxation for the town.

6. To secure an efficient system of school supervision for each town.

7. To enable every town to establish a system of graded schools.

8. To secure for the schools better teachers and for the teachers better compensation.

9. To improve schoolhouses and to provide them with what is needed for the use of the schools.

10. To promote uniformity of text-books and to introduce methods of teaching and courses of study.

11. To obtain more reliable statistics.

12. To secure and to care for town libraries, containing a greater variety and a larger number of books than can be obtained under the present system.

In regard to the practical effects of the adoption of this system, the able school officer to whom reference has repeatedly been made in this discussion, Hon. Newton Bateman, says:

"Not a right, power, or duty of the state superintendent, or of any county superintendent, would be added, subtracted, changed or modified in any manner whatever; the office of township treasurer would be just as necessary as before, and his powers and duties remain substantially as now, though much simplified by the abolition of the districts; the boards of trustees and directors would continue in the discharge of their

respective duties until the day fixed by law for the election of the new township school boards. Upon the election and qualification of these boards, all district boards of directors throughout the state would cease to exist \* \* \* all schoolhouses, lands and other district school property, would revert to and come into the control of the township board of education, who would thereupon assume and exercise the rights, powers and duties, all and singular, which now devolve upon boards of trustees and directors respectively. \* \* \*

Not a common school in the state would be closed or interfered with, not a teacher discharged, not an existing contract annulled. The great educational work of the state would move right on as if nothing had happened; no visible sign would appear to show that an immense administrative reform had taken place, and a new and glorious era dawned upon our system of public instruction. The vast accumulations of school property would be preserved intact; but few schoolhouses would have to be moved, and none at all immediately, for, as a general rule, school sites and buildings that are in the right places now, would be equally so then. Thus, quietly, without shock or confusion, almost without public knowledge or notice, the system would lay down the heavy, galling harness of her ten-thousand-headed policy, and assume the light, elastic armor of a fresh, compact and simple, but far more expansive and powerful organization. As in the case of our matchless civil government, the people would be reminded of its existence chiefly by the richness of the blessings which it would dispense."



## TOWNSHIP SYSTEM.

From the Report of A. J. Craig, 1868.

In order that the advantages of the township system may be clearly perceived, some of the disadvantages of the present system will be portrayed. Each town is divided into school districts, varying in number from one to sixteen, and averaging about six or seven to the town for the whole state. Each of these districts is a separate, independent republic, accountable to no higher authority, and dependent upon none, except in the matter of the examination of teachers, and the annual receipt and expenditure of a small amount of money. The first result of this isolated condition, and consequent separate action is

## UNEQUAL TAXATION.

Adjoining pieces of real estate, valued at the same rate by the assessor, are often taxed for school purposes in the ratio of three to one, simply because the size or character of the districts in which they lie is such that to support a school in one it is necessary to levy a tax, with a percentage three times as great as in the other. State, county and town taxes are assessed upon all property in the town on the same ratio, or percentage, and thus the burden of supporting the government falls equally upon all who have taxes to pay; but in the matter of education inequality is the law, no two school districts in any town having, as a rule, the same percentage.

It is a foundation principle of our system that the public schools shall be free; that the property of the state shall educate the children, but in carrying out this principle it is not necessary to violate another, which prescribes that taxation shall be uniform; and it is hard to understand how our people have submitted for so many years to the evil of unequal taxation consequent upon district organization. Education is a matter of general interest, and it is not to benefit the parent as an individual, or even for the child's own sake that the state establishes free schools. It is because education is necessary to the preservation of our government and institutions—necessary to society and the life of the state, that it claims and

has the right to tax the people to support schools; and the burden imposed should be distributed as equally as possible.

Each town is divided into road-districts, but we do not require the people residing in a particular district, through which a river runs, to build a bridge for the use of the town, county or state at large, as well as for themselves; nor is there any justice in compelling the inhabitants of a petty circumscribed school district to build the house in which their children are to be educated, so long as education is a matter of public interest, and those children will, in after years, be scattered all over the state.

The second evil inherent in the present system is:

#### EQUALITY OF PRIVILEGES.

In one district school will be maintained nine or ten months each year; in an adjoining one only five or six months, and yet the percentage of taxation may be greater in the latter than in the former. In one school competent teachers may be employed, and the range of studies pursued be such as to afford the pupils an education almost academic in its character; while in another only a few primary branches are taught by an inexperienced and incapable instructor. Districts are often organized in such form that a person resides in one while the greater part of his property is situated in another; and many live in close proximity to school-houses to which they would be glad to send their children, but cannot because they are not in the same district, while the houses to which they are compelled to send them are remote and difficult of access.

It often happens that a populous district possesses a small, badly arranged house, while an adjoining district, with few scholars, has a large and convenient one; yet the children of the populous district cannot attend the school in the other without consent of the board and the payment of a tuition fee, and the populous district may have but a limited amount of assessable property, and not be able to erect a suitable school-house for a term of years.

In the third place the present system is a fruitful source or cause of discord and contention. It is natural that a small and weak district should seek to obtain additions to its terri-

tory from neighboring districts larger and stronger than itself. Application is made to the town supervisors for a change in the boundaries of certain districts. When the changes asked for are granted, those individuals removed from old associations appeal to the state superintendent to set aside the action of the supervisors. When the supervisors refuse to make the changes desired, the parties petitioning for such changes take an appeal and ask that the supervisors be ordered to grant the prayer of the petitioners. Each party uses all the means at command to secure the ends desired, and personalities and vituperation often take the place of fact and argument. Thus neighborhoods and communities are violently agitated and enmities are engendered which last for years, seriously crippling the schools, and impeding the progress of education.

It is often very difficult to decide cases brought before the state superintendent on appeal, the facts and arguments on one side being about balanced by those on the other, and no matter what the decision may be, it fails to satisfy both sides. Between thirty and forty appeals have been decided since the first of January last, and a large majority of them relate to the organization of districts, or a change in their boundaries.

Again, the district system is unnecessarily expensive. There are nearly five thousand districts in the state, each of which must have a treasurer who is required to give a bond for the faithful discharge of the duties of his office. Besides the expense of the instrument itself, the trouble of getting sureties, etc., the bond must have a revenue stamp affixed of the value of one dollar. The treasurer is elected every three years, but on account of resignations, removals, etc., the office is really filled about once in two years. This makes an average annual expense of between two thousand and two thousand five hundred dollars; an unnecessary expenditure, as every dollar of the money received and paid out by the district treasurers comes through the hands of the town treasurers, who have themselves given bonds for the safe keeping of the funds entrusted to their care, and who might as well pay them out in detail to teachers and others entitled to them. There are many other evils incident to the district system, as all who are

familiar with its working are aware, but space will not be taken to enumerate them all. For most of them the township system furnishes a simple and ample remedy, as will be seen when its features are carefully examined.

The fundamental principle of this system is that each town constitutes a district for purposes of taxation and general supervision and management. This does away at once with unequal taxation. As all taxes for school purposes are levied upon the town as a whole, every man pays the same percentage on the assessed valuation of his property.

The present districts would constitute sub-districts, in each of which an officer should be elected annually, called a director, and all the directors in a town would constitute a board of directors, which should have the entire control and management of the schools and school interests. The secretary of this board takes the place of the old town superintendent, visits and supervises the schools, grades them, and assists the teachers in classifying the pupils, etc., in a word is the efficient agent of the board and the connecting link between the county superintendent and the schools.

The advantages of this system are many, and evident.

1. Each parent would be permitted to send his children to the school which best accommodated them, and all the expense, trouble and ill-feeling consequent upon the frequent changes in the boundaries of districts would be avoided.

2. School houses would be built when and where they are needed. Many districts are now compelled to suffer, year after year, all the inconveniences and loss occasioned by the use of a small, badly constructed, ill-arranged house, because of difficulties concerning the site, or the indisposition of the voters to furnish the means to erect a new building. Under the township system these difficulties would be avoided, as the board, composed of delegates from all parts of the town, would not be likely to be influenced by local disputes in reference to the site for a house, but would locate it at such point as would best accommodate those for whom it was selected; and as the funds for building the house would be drawn from the whole town, the tax upon each individual would be so small as not to be in

the least burdensome, and there would be no necessity for delay.

3. Schools can be graded more easily under the township than under the separate district system. The districts, as now organized, as a general rule, are too feeble in numbers and wealth to maintain more than one department, and the law of 1858, permitting districts to unite for high school purposes, has been entirely inoperative, no action having been taken by any district in accordance with its provisions. The summer schools, in the country especially, are primary schools in most respects, while the winter schools embrace all grades of pupils from the primary to the grammar or high school. This condition of things necessitates the employment of better educated, more experienced teachers during the winter term, at a cost for their services of about double the amount paid for the same length of time in the summer, while there is not on an average, more than a dozen children in each district whose capacity, advancement, or range of studies, demands a better or more costly teacher than the one employed during the summer; and thus the education of these few costs the districts the difference between the wages paid in summer and winter, amounting, for a four months' school, to from thirty to sixty dollars. Now if there were, within the reach of a larger class of pupils in three or four districts, a school of a higher grade, to which they could all have access, the winter school in their respective districts could be continued as a primary or intermediate school, under the charge of the same teacher employed in the summer, and one higher grade teacher would suffice for several districts. By this arrangement all the pupils in a town would be divided into two grades, at a cost for tuition not greater than that now incurred; and the total additional expense would be measured by the cost of erecting a sufficient number of buildings to accommodate the higher grade of pupils. In many instances, by a proper arrangement of the terms of school, the houses already erected would serve for both grades of pupils. In some district, in which the house is so situated as to be easy of access to the larger scholars in several surrounding districts, let there be a term of school commencing so soon as the ground is settled and the weather is pleasant in spring,

and continuing to the first of July; and a fall term commencing about the middle of August and continuing till the middle of November; thus affording the primary pupils six months or more of uninterrupted school during the most pleasant season of the year, which would be far more beneficial to them, intellectually and physically, than the usual summer and winter terms, with the extremes of warm and cold weather, producing sickness, tardiness, and irregularity of attendance, and thus wasting a good share of the money expended. The winter term could then be devoted entirely to the grammar or higher grade scholars, who, under a competent instructor, whose whole time was given to them and their studies, would make as much progress in one term as they now do, in the mixed schools, in two or more. Again, whenever a new school house is to be built, its location, size, and internal arrangements can all be adapted to the new order of things, so that, in process of time, without any violent changes, or any appreciable increase of expense, the facilities for maintaining graded schools can be established throughout the state.

4. Better supervision of the schools. The county superintendent, though exercising a general supervision over all the schools in his county, is entirely unable to give, to each school, that personal attention necessary to obtain a complete knowledge of its condition and wants; and some of the most active and efficient superintendents have felt the need of a local officer, to co-operate with and aid them in effecting improvements in the management of the schools. As before stated, the secretary of the town board will be the proper person to have the immediate supervision of the schools, and will have power, under the direction of the board, to grade and arrange them, suggest and enforce rules for their management and government, and advise with and assist the teachers in all cases in which advice and assistance are needed. He should be appointed by the board, and he may be one of their number, or not, so that the best person to fill the place is selected.

We should thus secure all the advantages of the town superintendent system, without losing any of the benefits resulting from the establishment of the county superintendency.

5. Economy of administration. All the expenses now in-

curred in organizing new districts, and in changing the boundaries of old ones, would be saved. Each child being permitted to attend that school which best accommodated him, and the amount of tax which each person would pay being the same, no matter in what sub-district he resided, there would be no reason for altering districts; consequently very few changes would be made, and those few would be easily effected, and attended with little or no expense. Again, the liability to a loss of moneys is in proportion to the number of hands through which they pass, and it is no wonder that, with nearly five thousand disbursing officers, there is a good deal of waste of district funds every year.

Under the township system the financial affairs of all the schools in a town being managed by the same board, one treasurer would be sufficient, and, in order not to multiply officers, the town treasurer, who now collects and receives all the school moneys belonging to his town, might be the treasurer of the board, and upon the order of its secretary, countersigned by the president, could pay out such moneys, when needed. Thus the number of disbursing officers would be reduced from nearly five thousand, to less than eight hundred, and besides the diminished liability to loss on account of the decrease in the number of disbursing officers, the expense incurred in executing nearly two thousand treasurers' bonds each year would be saved.

6. There would be an equality of privileges in the different districts, as, the schools being supported by a general tax, justice would require that they be maintained an equal length of time throughout the town, and we should not see, as we now do, so great a disparity in school privileges in adjoining districts.

Free schools are founded upon the principle that it is the duty of the state to see that the children within its limits are educated. To this end a generous public fund is provided, and the people are yearly taxed to support the system; yet the kind and amount of instruction given to the children of different districts depend entirely upon influences which the law does not seek to guide or control. Now common sense and justice demand, that wherever children enough to organize a

school are found, one should be established, with all the means and appliances necessary to secure the result desired,—the proper education of the children attending it.

7. Employment of Teachers. It being the special duty of the secretary of the town board to visit the schools, become acquainted with their condition and wants, the capacity, tact, and success of the different teachers, he would be better qualified to select the person suited to each school than nine tenths of the district clerks under the present system possibly can be; thus better teachers would be employed—that is, teachers better adapted to their positions—and they would not be changed each term, as they now are, but would remain in one school so long as they were successful in their work. Incompetent and unsuccessful teachers would be sifted out, the standard of attainments of all those employed would be gradually and surely raised, and the consequent progress of the schools would be certain and uninterrupted.

The new system of examination by the county superintendent has done much to elevate the standard of attainments, and weed out unsuccessful teachers; but, inasmuch as an examination in regard to scholarship is not always a true test of the qualifications of an applicant, and it is not possible for the county superintendent to give that personal attention to each school necessary to enable him to judge correctly in regard to the skill and faithfulness of the teacher, many persons are still employed who have no real fitness for their position, and who are retained through favoritism or indifference on the part of those by whom they are engaged. Such persons would be quietly dropped from the list of teachers, and would engage in other pursuits, or, by the use of proper means, become fitted for their responsible positions as instructors of youth.

I have thus presented some of the main points in which it is believed that the township system is superior to the district system, and it only remains to notice some of the objections urged to it by those who object to change, or who are satisfied with the system as it is.

The first objection is to the raising of taxes for the support of schools by the town at large. Looking at the matter from a personal standpoint, many think a general tax would



be unjust to different localities, for the reason that children of school age are not proportioned to the valuation of property, and thus a wealthy district, with few children would pay for the education of children residing in other districts. This objection is the same one so often urged against free schools by the childless capitalist, or the wealthy tax-payer whose children are already educated, "I ought not to pay for educating my neighbor's children." As before stated, free schools are established on the assumption that "the property of the state shall educate the children of the state," and consistency requires that the details of the system shall be so arranged as to carry out this fundamental principle. What justice is there in requiring that a specified portion of territory shall furnish the means to educate the children residing therein, so long as you withhold from the tax-payers the power to decide who shall inhabit that territory?

The fact is, that the fairest method of maintaining the schools would be by a tax upon the whole state, and the larger the district embraced in one organization, the more just and equal will be the taxation.

The moneys apportioned yearly by the state superintendent, and those levied upon the towns by the county board of supervisors, are distributed to each district in proportion to the number of children between the ages of four and twenty residing therein; and as the latter moneys are raised by a tax upon each town as a whole, and not by separate districts, the plan advocated is, in fact, in operation already, and only needs to be extended to the levy and collection of all the funds needed to support the schools.

In the second place, many will object to the raising of funds by the whole town, to build a school house in a particular district, who would be willing that the schools should be supported by a general tax, after the houses are built. This objection is removed by considering the town as a single district, which needs several houses to accommodate its pupils. It is true, that, for convenience sake, the town is divided into sub-districts, yet, for general purposes it is a unit, and should be managed accordingly. Each town is divided into road districts, and when a new highway is to be laid out, the whole

town is called upon to pay the expense incurred for right of way, etc., though but few of its tax-payers are personally benefited; and when a bridge is to be built no one thinks of asking the citizens residing in the road district in which the bridge is needed, to furnish the funds to pay for erecting it; and it cannot be that the education of the children of Wisconsin, is a matter of less interest to the people than the laying out of highways, and the erection of bridges. Returns made to the state superintendent show that, on an average, in the larger counties, not more than four school houses are built in each year; and this would give to each town but one to build every three years, and this burden, being borne by all the tax-payers would be so light, as scarcely to be felt. All the children would thus be provided with school privileges, and the protracted effort and struggle now necessary in most districts, in order to secure the erection of a school house, would be avoided.

In order to avoid all seeming injustice, it might be provided, that those districts which had, within a certain limited time, erected good and substantial houses, should be exempted from the payment of the taxes raised for building school houses, for a number of years after the adoption of the township system.

All other inequalities and seeming irregularities can be as well provided for, and it is confidently believed, that a law can be framed, preserving for our school system all its prominent vital and valuable features, and engrafting thereon such additional ones as will give it harmony and completeness, make it a better exponent of our educational standing, more worthy of affection and generous support, and insure the successful accomplishment of its great design, the education and elevation of the whole people.

## THE TOWNSHIP SYSTEM.

(By Superintendent Fallows.)

Hon. Samuel Fallows, in his report for 1870, devotes several pages to commendation of the township system. He quotes with approval the enumeration of its benefits made by Supt. McMynn, which is given on page 37. He also commends

the statement of the disadvantages of the single district system set forth by Supt. Craig and his enumeration of the benefits of the township system. He then quotes Supt. Bateman's statement of the readiness and lack of friction attending the change. See pages 37 and 38. This is followed by a lengthy quotation from the School Monthly written by Assistant Superintendent Pratt from which the following quotation is made:

At present, one half the schools at least are taught by young persons, almost entirely incompetent for the work. This great evil would not be wholly cured, but could be greatly mitigated under the town system; as could also the miserable plan of a constant change of teachers. At present, each district looks out for itself alone. The schools are opened about the same time. There is a rush to the spring examinations; the schools are hastily filled; the summer term is taught and the teacher goes; the fall examination comes on, and the same thing is repeated. Out of 5,000 schools, over 3,000 change teachers every term. A town board would engage teachers sufficient to fill the schools; they would place them where they would be most useful. Even where the schools are not kept open more than five or six months during the year, it would be possible to give a good corps of teachers something like permanent employment. It is far less important that the schools be all open at the same time in a town than that they be well taught. A teacher having taught two or three months in a certain school, is transferred, let us suppose, for a similar term, to another school. Some of the larger pupils will probably follow her. Under suitable restrictions, all children may be allowed to attend any school that is open and within reach. It is of less moment that children attend school "not less than five months in the year," than that they learn something when they do go. No intelligent person needs to be told that a two months' training under a competent teacher is vastly better than a four months' droning and drawling, under an incompetent one.

In 1871 Superintendent Fallows renews at length his recommendation of the township system. From this report the following extracts are taken:

A. F. North, Esq., an intelligent teacher and town officer, and superintendent elect of Waukesha county, thus presents the subject in reference to "Inequality of Taxation under the 'District System.'"

"The foundations of our free institutions were laid by the Puritans, when they made this compact in the May-flower, viz.: 'That every settler should have equal rights, and that they would obey the laws they should make for the common good.' This sentence contains the essence of all free government. But they saw clearly that the stability of such a government as well as the well-being of the individual could only be maintained by universal education, and they took measures at an early date (1636) to secure this end by action of the state. Enlightened statesmen throughout the world are bearing testimony to the soundness of these views, and in spite of bigots and reactionists, are pressing forward to their attainment; and announce as the safety of the state depends upon the intelligence of the people, the state must secure this by popular education—in other words the property in the state must educate the children in the state, and this with at least some good degree of equality. It is upon this basis that the school fund is distributed. It is apportioned, not in the ratio of the property in the district, but upon the number of children to be educated therein. And this is the true principle, and should be of general application. But it is not so, and very few persons are aware how widely different from this is the fact with regard to the distribution of the burden in our towns under the present district system.

"The annexed table will show its operation in Pewaukee, Waukesha county, which is believed to be a type of the condition of things, generally, throughout the state:

	No. of scholars.	Value of prop- erty in district.	Amount per scholar.
District No. 1.....	221	\$235,09C 00	\$1,068 00
District No. 2.....	44	124,563 00	2,376 00
District No. 3.....	92	172,285 00	1,861 00
District No. 4.....	79	61,393 00	784 00
District No. 7.....	47	47,080 00	1,001 00
District No. 8.....	29	72,922 00	2,860 00
District No. 9.....	76	116,198 00	1,529 00
District No. 10.....	48	75,209 00	1,566 00
District No. 6.....	97	105,024 00	1,083 00
Whole town.....	732	\$1,008,964 00	\$1,378 00

"By reference to the above table, it will be seen that while in the whole town there is \$1,378 for each scholar; in District

No 4, there is only \$784, about one half this amount and in District No. 8, there is \$2,860; over double the average amount. I hope to be able soon to show how this matter stands in the other towns in this county. Such a state of things is conclusive argument in favor of the township system."

I also quote a few paragraphs from a report of Hon. A. E. Rankin, Secretary of the Vermont Board of Education, and may add that Vermont, in common with other New England States, is moving in this direction, following the lead of Massachusetts, where the system is now fully established by law, to the manifest great improvement of the common schools of that state:

"While we strive assiduously so to economize as not to increase the expense of our educational system, we do not take proper pains that the money which is annually expended shall be so applied as to secure the largest returns.

"Let me enumerate some of the prominent obstacles which are in the way of the greatest efficiency of our schools:

"1. Total lack of or insufficient supervision.

"2. Constant change of supervision.

"3. Poorly qualified teachers.

"4. Constant change of teachers.

"5. Lack of interest in schools, on the part of patrons.

"6. Employment of relatives and favorites without regard to qualifications.

"7. Too small schools in many districts.

"8. Too short schools in many districts.

"9. Employment of immature and incompetent teachers in small districts.

"10. Poor schoolhouses.

"11. Irregular attendance.

"12. General lack of facilities to aid the teacher.

"13. No schools at all in many districts.

"14. Lack of proper classification.

"15. Pupils study what they choose and not what they ought.

"These twice seven and one plagues of our common school system will be recognized by every one who has had any experience in connection with the public schools of the state.

"If it should be shown that this nest of evils which so impairs the efficiency of our schools could in some measure be removed by a radical change of system, no one surely would oppose such change.

"I am confident that these evils may in very great measure

be alleviated by a change in our system of public schools. I believe that the adoption of what is called the town system, in contradistinction from the district system, would tend largely to diminish them."

Again in 1872, he urges the system, giving quotations favorable to it from the reports of county superintendents.

## TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOLS.

(From the report of Edward Searing—1875.)

Having long been persuaded of the superior advantages inherent in the township system of school organization, I recommended in my first report, as steps toward the ultimate adoption of that system generally throughout the state, two distinct measures of legislation: (1.) A law to encourage the voluntary creation of town high-schools: and, (2.) A law to provide for uniformity of text-books in towns, and to authorize the purchase and ownership of books by the same. It appeared to me that if a number of towns could be induced to take voluntary action in these directions, not only would great gain result to these towns, but the question of the adoption of the complete system of organization by these and others would be only a question of time. The last legislature gave full endorsement to the former recommendation by the passage of the high-school law. To its partial endorsement of the latter I have elsewhere referred.

As soon as other duties, and a full previous consideration of the task would allow, I prepared a circular setting forth the purpose and character of the high-school law, with such comments upon its provisions as would render them easily intelligible, and with what appeared to be judicious courses of instruction for the schools contemplated.

As this circular was not ready for distribution until August, and as the law was not generally known and understood throughout the state previously, no schools could be in operation under its provisions until September, or later. Hence it is impossible to embrace in the present report any statistics of the number, character, work, and cost of these schools. Full

information respecting them will be given in my next report.

I am enabled to say, however, that the law has met with very general favor, and that there is reason to believe it will, in due time, accomplish all that its projectors and friends have anticipated. I herewith present the circular, above referred to, and follow it with brief reports from the county superintendents respecting its popularity, and its applicability to the needs of their respective localities.

#### HIGH SCHOOL CIRCULAR.

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction,

Madison, August 8, 1875.

To school officers and friends of education in Wisconsin:

Dr. Ryerson, for thirty years past the distinguished and successful chief superintendent of public instruction of the province of Ontario, Canada, recently said, in substance, of the American public school-system, that in the cities and larger villages it gives admirable results, the schools there being among the best in the world; but that in giving nothing better to rural neighborhoods than the present ungraded district schools it is there deserving of no praise. The results there accomplished, he asserts, are "far below and short of the state appropriations made and the machinery employed for the sound education of the people." Yet he maintains that the rural parts of the state are "the peculiar field of a national school-law and system."

Hon. Newton Bateman, of Illinois, says in his last biennial report: "Leaving out of view the many exceptional cases, it may be broadly affirmed that the educational facilities afforded in the cities and towns, as a whole, are so superior to those afforded in the country districts, as a whole, as to make it easier to contrast than to compare them."

An intelligent writer, in a recent number of the "Illinois Schoolmaster," says: "It is a sad comment on the intelligence of the age, that the status of the district schools of today is but little better than that of twenty years ago."

When some eighteen months ago the writer of this had just been elected to the office he holds, a legal friend incidentally, but with some earnestness said to him: "I hope you will turn your chief attention to the schoolhouse at the cross-roads."

The poor character and the scanty amount of the instruction in "the schoolhouse at the cross-roads," have long been known and deplored by intelligent American educators. The shortcomings of that school, scarcely less forcibly indicated by the suggestive advice of the lawyer, who was in no sense an educational man, than by the direct testimony of some of the most experienced and wisest of educational men, are a source of constant concern to those entrusted with school supervision.

Nay, the state itself acknowledges the failure, and seeks by various means a remedy. It provides costly normal schools, and numerous institutes for the better qualification of teachers. It establishes a system of examinations and licenses by which it is supposed the incompetent will be debarred from a work they are unqualified to perform. These things it does chiefly in the interest of country schools. Cities and towns will generally afford good educational facilities without the aid of the supervising machinery of the state.

The chief defects of the country schools are the following:

1. The teachers are unqualified. They are generally youthful, of very slender intellectual attainments, inexperienced, and untrained.

2. The schools are ungraded. There are consequently so many studies and classes that even the most accomplished teachers would labor under serious disadvantages from want of time.

3. The course of instruction is so limited that it is not sufficient for the desires and needs of very many of the brighter and more advanced pupils.

It is not a reproach to the teachers of country schools that they are young and unqualified. The schools do not offer them inducements to more than temporary, casual, and inefficient work.

It is not wholly a reproach to the country districts that inducements to higher qualifications are not offered by the schools. Country districts generally have a scanty population and limited means for providing good educational facilities.

It is chiefly a reproach to the state system that it has taken no means to remove the surprising inequality of educational privileges enjoyed by those in different localities, and especially by the many in the country, and the few in cities and towns.



Not merely in strictly rural districts, but in many villages—even those which may number their inhabitants by the thousand—the schools fall below a reasonable standard in both the character and extent of the instruction they afford. Even here the teachers are poorly paid, are often inefficient, and are perpetually changing. The course of instruction is so limited that it does not meet the demands of all the pupils. Many of these must go from home to obtain not only the preparation that shall fit them for college, but even that which shall fairly qualify them for certain business avocations.

The causes of these deficiencies are to be found partly in a public sentiment that fails to appreciate and demand higher educational facilities, and deems the cost of them too burdensome, and partly in the inexperience of school-boards which are perpetually changing their membership and have no just conception of either their duty or their responsibility. The chief cause here, however, is also in the want of any well organized system by which the activities of these schools can be in common directed and sustained. Local independence is carried to an unwise extreme. The state affords but a very small fractional part of their support, and has almost nothing to say in regard to their courses of study, the qualifications of their teachers, their relations to other schools, and their general management.

Nominally we have a state system of public instruction, but practically this system is a great aggregation of nearly independent local schools, bound together by the gossamer threads of an annual "report" and an annual distribution of a pittance of a few cents to each school child. In the matter of an efficient system, securing the best results from the money expended, several other countries are in advance of us, not only in respect to the schools of rural neighborhoods, but also the uniformly good character of those in towns and villages.

Again, the defective character of our state system is seen in the absence of a sufficient number of schools preparatory to the state university. The latter has been established at the head of our system for the benefit of the entire state; but the creation and maintenance of local means of preparation for the university have been left to chance. The state has prescribed

no preparatory courses of study, and has offered no material aid for the support of such courses. The consequence is that in but very few of the public schools can full preparation for the freshman classes of the university be had, and the latter is still obliged to do a large amount of preparatory work which is below its legitimate sphere of performance. The graded or high schools of most cities and larger villages have courses which if slightly increased would give the desired preparation; but to accomplish this increase, it is asserted, would add to the already heavy burden of cost for the benefit of only a very small number of pupils. Hence, these schools are usually graded without reference to anything above them, and the few bright and ambitious youth who desire university culture must seek elsewhere, at an age when they most need home influences, the full preparation which should be more safely and inexpensively afforded them at home.

To recapitulate, the defects in the educational system are: first, and chiefly, in the country district schools, where we find the teachers young and inefficient, the subjects of instruction and the classes instructed too numerous, and the absence of the incentives that local schools of higher grade afford; second, in the schools of many villages and cities, where we too frequently find poor instruction in the higher studies, and generally find the course of these studies too limited; and third, in the consequent isolation of the state university from the system of schools beneath it.

The most experienced and thoughtful educational men of the state hold that a remedy for these defects is to be found in a systematic encouragement and guidance of secondary (academic or high school) instruction.

Let the state make a special appropriation, as is wisely done in some others, for the benefit of high schools, and let these be multiplied and rendered more efficient throughout the whole commonwealth. Let their relations to the existing country district schools be such as to relieve, encourage, and strengthen them; and let their relations to the university, on the other hand, be such as to enable it to properly perform its own legitimate, large and beneficent work in the fields of higher culture.

These were the ideas of the framers and supporters of the

free high-school law of last winter, a law which, it is hoped, will materially tend to unify and strengthen all the educational forces of the state. To explain the origin, purpose, and character of this law, and to commend it to the intelligent interest of the people of Wisconsin, for whose benefit it was enacted by their chosen representatives, is the chief purpose of this circular.

A perusal of the law herewith given, with such comments as will be likely to render its provisions easily intelligible, will show that its leading purpose is to encourage the establishment of township high schools, and thus to afford to rural neighborhoods the benefit of the higher educational facilities usually found only in cities and some large villages. It is the hope of the friends of this law that very many of the rural townships of the state will avail themselves of the advantages it offers. Some have already intelligently taken steps to do so, and many others are considering and discussing the propriety of similar action. In order to make clear the wisdom of the township school, its relation to the existing district schools and its influence upon the latter, no more excellent illustration can be found than is embodied in the graphic words of Hon. Newton Bateman, in the last Illinois school-report, to which earnest attention is invited:

#### AN ILLUSTRATION.

To place in a clear light the indirect influence referred to in at least one of its manifestations, we will take a familiar case. Here is a rural township divided into six districts (the average number), and in each district there is and for years has been one ordinary common school. No one of these six schools is particularly different from or better than the others. In each there is the usual diversity of ages, attainments, and conditions; the usual books and studies, and the multiplication of classes incident to the necessities of the case. For the law admits all the youth in each district between the ages of six and twenty-one years, and during part of the year, at least, nearly all are in attendance. Little fellows who have just touched the line of eligibility, are there, for the first time, with their primers and spelling-books, intent upon mastering

the mysteries of the alphabet. There, too, are young men and misses, for the last time, having traversed again and again the most advanced ground of the scanty curriculum, yet hoping to gather up some additional crumbs of knowledge before saying good-bye to school. Between those extremes are all the gradations of age, aptitude, and attainment—the dull and the bright, the fast and the slow, the gentle and the rough, the strong and the weak—all to be instructed and cared for in innumerable ways, by the one teacher. He does the best he can. If he can find four or five near enough together in knowledge and capacity to be formed into a class in any one of the branches taught, he is glad to do it. And so of still smaller numbers, down to even two. But after exhausting all possibilities in this direction, he finds that the remaining number of individual ones, exceeds the whole number of his classes. To each of these individual pupils he must give such occasional and hurried assistance as he can. He works hard, but at a fearful disadvantage. Systematic teaching is out of the question—concentration of effort is impossible. He has but single minutes where he should have five, ten, or fifteen—but seconds often, where he should have minutes. Instead of that smooth, quiet, and sequential movement of school-life and work which, reacting, produces mental tranquility and steadiness in the pupils, there is confusion, hurry, disorder, friction. No fixed time-table or schedule of school exercises is possible—no pupil knows just when he will be called upon to recite, or when he can have needful assistance. The order of work is never the same for two consecutive days unless by chance—cannot be. Individual pupils often go, in emergencies, a whole day or more without being able to secure a moment's attention from the teacher, and in the mean time they may be at a standstill for lack of light upon some obscure point in the lesson, or a hint of the way out of some tangle, or over some obstacle. And when the favorable moment for explanation comes, the teacher may be called away just at the critical point where a few words more would make everything clear. Discontent, listlessness, loss of interest, indifference, inevitably ensue. The tone of the school is lowered; a sort of weary spiritlessness settles down upon it; duties are performed in a careless, mechanical way, and the hours drag heavily on. There is nothing beyond, no other school to go to, no outside incentive to effort, no fresh breeze from any quarter to stir the surface of the sluggish waters. In each of the six schools the state of affairs is substantially the same.

Now let a good township high school, with fresh and advanced studies, superior teachers, improved methods, regular

classes, progressive steps, and thorough systematic instruction, be opened in that township, and what a transformation would be wrought in those sluggish schools. What an awaking and quickening breath would reanimate those tired and torpid boys and girls. There is something to work for now; an objective point to be gained; a prize to be reached. The high school becomes a topic of absorbing interest to all who expect to continue their studies, and their enthusiasm is communicated to all the rest. The new school, its teachers, classes, discipline, and internal arrangements are eagerly discussed, morning, noon, and evening, and especially the conditions of admission and the chances of success. Those who are to go to the high school begin at once, with zest and spirit, the work of preparation for the examinations that will crown or disappoint their hopes. Early and late they are at their books, which are suddenly invested with a new interest and importance. As the decisive day approaches, knots of boys and beves of girls gather in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, to review the subjects on which they are to be examined—each in turn questioning the others thereon. Those six district schools, lately so dull, glow with healthful excitement, and become very bee-hives of industry. Those who pass to the high school add to the interest already awakened, by their stirring accounts of their new duties and experiences. Meeting daily with the pupils of the lower schools, they answer innumerable questions, and seek to satisfy the tireless curiosity of their less fortunate companions. Strong bonds of friendship are thus established between the schools, and good feeling prevails on every hand. Such as failed at the first examination try again, and many who had expected their days of pupilage to end with the common school, are induced by the contagion of example to reconsider their purpose, and press on towards the high school. Thus is the whole aspect of school affairs in the township changed for the better. The children are wide awake, the parents become intersted, everybody catches more or less of the new inspiration,—and yet this is but the indirect influence of one township high-school.

Such are the advantages of a high school supplementing the district schools of a township. The establishment of such a school under the present law is neither difficult nor expensive. With one-half the cost of instruction paid by the state, the expense to many towns where the school is most needed will be slight, and in some cases probably nothing. It is not neces-

sary to immediately erect a building. In nearly every town a building, or at least a room, already exists which can be temporarily utilized for the school—a vacant hall, the basement of a church, an unused room in a school building or the like. Nearly every dollar expended can be and should be devoted to competent instruction.

If the cost of maintaining the school throughout the year is too great for a poor township, let it be continued one or two terms in the year. A single yearly term held in the winter will in many localities meet a pressing need and furnish great benefit to the older pupils whose circumstances permit attendance at no other time, and for whom the district schools afford neither attraction nor profit.

The location of the school will in most cases naturally be at the chief place of business resort in the town. If there is a village with anything like a central location, it will be there. If there are two villages, the terms of the high school might be held alternately in each. If a village is located near the boundry-line between two towns, both the latter might profitably unite in establishing and supporting the school.

It would be decidedly for the common advantage to have the high schools maintained by townships rather than by districts, and a vigorous effort should always first be made to secure the desired action of the people through the town organization. The object, character, and scope of the law should be clearly and fairly explained to them. The benefit to the common schools in the better qualified teachers, fewer classes, and the incentive to the ambition of pupils; the general value of higher intelligence; the enhanced price of real estate as the result of good educational facilities—all these things should be and can be made intelligible to the voters of the town by personal explanations to individuals, by a public address to a meeting called for the purpose, by appeals through the press, and by other means at the disposal of the intelligent friends of education and progress.

Perhaps the most effective argument with some would be the simple arithmetical proof that a town might enjoy the benefits of a high school under the law, actually without cost, or

even with a pecuniary gain. Without injuring the district schools of the town, but, on the contrary, to their decided profit, female teachers might be employed in them the year through, instead of for the summer only. The slight tax for the support of the high school might thus be saved, or possibly more than saved to particular districts, by the diminished cost of winter schools.

Or, again, in some towns the district schools might profitably confine their sessions to two short spring and fall terms for the benefit of the younger pupils, leaving the educational energies of the town to center entirely in the high school during the winter months. This course is suggested by one of the most experienced and successful normal-school men of the State.

But when a town is opposed to and refuses to vote the establishment of a high school, then it may be for the interest of a village district therein to organize the same unaided. The law allows the single district to do so, and to the school established by it properly qualified pupils from other parts of the town may be admitted on payment of tuition.

In cities and incorporated villages existing "graded" or "high schools" may be reorganized, under the law, into free high schools and share in the bounty of the State, by complying with the proper conditions.

It should be understood in all cases that the design of the law is not to grant gratuitous aid to any school, whether in a town, village, or city. Something must be returned as an equivalent. There must either be a new creation of a school not before in existence, or a reorganization and improvement after a common plan. There may be a few exceptions to this in the case of schools already performing well the work designated and called for by the new law, but State bounty to these is simply giving them what they have already earned and deserved. The great majority of the schools must be new creations, or reorganizations with improvements. It is expected that the local authorities will in all cases employ the State bounty either to create anew or to improve what already exists, if not already up to the proper standard. The state bounty is not designed to take the place of the district, village, town, or

city appropriation, but simply to supplement the latter for the purposes of improvement. If a district, village, or town obtains three or five hundred dollars from the State, it is expected that every dollar thereof will be devoted to more efficient or more extended instruction.

#### FROM THE REPORT OF WILLIAM C. WHITFORD—1878.

The old-fashioned school district must have been the product of accident rather than of intelligent design. Originating in New England, it naturally spread westward. So long as nothing but elementary instruction was expected from the public schools, and while a system of academies furnished, to a considerable extent, that of a higher grade, the defects of the public school system were not so seriously felt. Then, it is to be noted that Massachusetts, as early as 1647, required every town, with one hundred families, to maintain a "grammar school," which meant a school that could fit for the university.

For many years past, a better plan than that of single, independent districts has been earnestly advocated, and to some extent introduced. In 1852, Pennsylvania made the town, borough, and city, the unit for school purposes. Iowa adopted the same system in 1858. Massachusetts introduced it gradually, and for several years it has been universal in that State. The other New England states are moving in the same direction, as is also New York. Ohio and Indiana have tried a mixture of the two systems, but without satisfactory results. In the former state, the people are calling earnestly for the town system proper. Wisconsin should not be the last state to secure this great improvement. It is time for her to take a step "forward," and make the system obligatory.

The advantages of the system may be briefly restated, at this time, under the following heads:

1. It would promote economy and simplicity. A town with ten districts, not an unusual number, requires the services of thirty school officers, besides those of the town clerk, the town treasurer, and the town board, in the administration of school affairs. A board of five directors, with the town treasurer,



would do all the business more intelligently, more efficiently, and at less expense.

2. It would aid in securing peace and quiet. As shown by the numerous appeals taken to the state superintendent, and by the correspondence of the office, there are constant disputes about district boundaries, the lawfulness of the action of district meetings or district boards, to the great detriment of the schools. Under the consolidated system, this trouble would mostly disappear. Each voter would have, as now, a voice in the election of the school officers, and in the determination of the school policy. Each taxpayer would pay his school taxes for the general good, and be allowed to send to the most convenient and appropriate school.

3. School taxes would be uniform and equitable. Public schools are for the public good, and should be supported at the public charge. A state school tax, supplementing the income of the school fund, would leave the local taxation lighter, and the burden of sustaining the schools would be still further equalized.

4. The schools would also be much more uniform, and of better average quality. At present, we find an excellent school, perhaps, in one district, and in the next a poor one; chiefly, sometimes, because the people are poor. But the state cannot afford to tolerate poor schools.

5. Graded schools are generally out of the question, under the present system. Under a town system, they could be much more readily introduced, as increase of population, and the advancement of pupils might render it desirable. A considerable number of towns could at once establish a central school of higher grade, open to all pupils of sufficient advancement. This would, in effect, grade the other schools. Some advantages, beyond those of elementary instruction, would thus be attainable, more especially in towns embracing villages.

6. A course of study could be much more readily introduced, and made uniform, if desired, for the county.

7. Text-books and apparatus could be uniformly and adequately supplied, and at reasonable rates.

8. Teachers would be employed for their fitness, and longer retained, and would do far better work. A superior teacher

would naturally be secured for the central school of highest grade, if established, who would diffuse correct methods of teaching, through all the schools.

9. Supervision, now almost a nullity, would be exercised by such head teacher, or by the secretary of the town board; and the general care of the schools on the part of the county superintendent, would be properly supplemented.

10. School-houses would be better, and better located, the law providing, as it does now, for the equalization of cost, for a series of years.

11. Town libraries would naturally and readily connect themselves with a town system of schools, greatly to the public benefit.

12. Statistics would be uniform, reliable, and of some value.

No human system is perfect. The school system here advocated, opens possibilities nevertheless which can not be realized under the present one, except in rare cases. It would certainly render it practicable to make the bulk of the country schools much better than they now are; and the system should, therefore, be enacted into law, without much longer delay. The present permissive law was intended as an experiment. Though well devised, in the main, it retains too much of the present system, and should be carefully recast.

In the report for 1881, Superintendent Whitford says:

The experience of the state has confirmed my conviction from the beginning that this system would never obtain, on the optional plan, a general foothold in our towns. Our citizens must accept the methods employed by other states for its adoption, before its superior advantages will be known throughout our own state. A law enforcing its introduction into all the towns, where not now in operation, would doubtless receive at first considerable opposition, but it would shortly be acquiesced in by the school-districts. The arguments for the system I have presented in my former annual reports, and also for this procedure of the state in making it obligatory. It seems to me that the people are a well prepared now as they will be at any time in the next dozen years, to adopt the changes, and to use them profitably in their management of the public schools.

## FROM REPORT OF SUPT. ROBERT GRAHAM, 1878.

In 1886 Hon. Robert Graham included in his biennial report an important table of statistics, based upon reports of town clerks for the year 1885, which is here reproduced as the most effective presentation of the inequalities and injustice of the independent district system. It will be observed that it includes reports from nearly every district in counties where this system was in operation. The table shows by counties the highest and lowest valuation of taxable property in school districts; the highest, lowest and average per cent. of school tax in school districts; the greatest, least and average number of persons of school age in school districts; and the highest, lowest and average tax per capita of school population in school districts.

A comparison should be made of the columns headed respectively "highest per cent. of school tax in any district" and "lowest per cent. of school tax in any district." For purposes of illustration, in Marinette county the former amounts to five per cent. in one district while the latter is one and one-tenth mills in another district. In the former district the charge on every dollar of assessed valuation for maintaining a public school was over forty times as great as in the case of the latter district—an inequality that could not possibly occur were the township system in vogue. In the column headed, "lowest valuation of any school district" it may be seen that districts whose valuation in 1885 was less than \$3,000 were called upon to maintain a public school for six months during the school year. There is little doubt that the valuation of districts in the same towns reached as high as \$40,000. One of the former districts was reported from Iowa county and is given a valuation of \$2,300. Inequality in the school population is also evident. Iowa county furnishes a district with but six children of school age while Jackson county has one with five. Without doubt neighboring districts contained at least fifty children. The table is valuable in that it furnishes reliable data in proof of the disadvantages that attend the independent district system.

TABLE.—Showing the highest and lowest valuation of taxable property in school districts, by counties, the highest, lowest and average per cent. of school tax in school districts, by counties, the greatest, least and average number of persons of school age in school districts, by counties, and the highest, lowest and average tax per capita, of school population in school districts, by counties, based upon reports of Town Clerks for the year 1885.

COUNTIES.	No. of districts within each county.	No. of such districts reported.	Highest valuation of any school district.		Lowest valuation of any school district.		Highest per cent. of school tax in any district.	Lowest per cent. of school tax in any district.	Average per cent. of school tax in school districts.	Greatest No. of persons of school age in any school district.	Lowest No. persons of school age in any school district.	Average No. of persons of school age in school districts.	Highest tax per capita of school population in any school district.		Lowest tax per capita of school population in any school district.		Average tax per capita.
			\$	¢	\$	¢							\$	¢	\$	¢	
Adams.....	46	44	\$25,902	\$5,856	.027	.05	.0101	84	8	39.3	\$11.36	\$1.32	\$3.65	7.35			
Ashland.....	12	12	180,361	4,541	.05	.002	.02	217	7	48.7	71.42	.94	19.64				
Barron.....	73	46	1,319,683	749,791	.004	.0026	.0038	322	12	134.0	24.51	18.41	2.09				
Bayfield.....	7	3	131,693	12,557	.01	.001	.0056	222	48	123.3	6.95	42	2.73				
Brown.....	70	68	63,291	10,202	.02	.002	.0069	117	33	63.2	8.00	80	2.36				
Buffalo.....	62	59	74,100	9,248	.011	.001	.0082	167	36	73.6	9.30	40	2.69				
Burnett.....	18	15	244,011	34,905	.007	.0005	.0027	223	23	95.7	9.00	26	6.15				
Calumet.....	53	53	157,182	7,078	.03	.001	.0083	391	8	52.4	37.50	1.00	7.10				
Chippewa.....	113	61	103,131	6,429	.05	.001	.0093	158	7	40.3	46.87	1.00	4.47				
Clark.....	77	69	155,390	7,476	.015	.001	.0039	178	11	47.3	16.18	1.00	2.91				
Columbia.....	108	96	77,580	6,862	.026	.002	.008	150	22	56.2	10.00	2.91	4.13				
Crawford.....	67	66	369,142	10,285	.02	.001	.0035	441	9	60.2	12.56	78	3.21				
Dane.....	177	164	226,281	21,621	.01	.0006	.0032	318	12	72.5	12.08	32	2.61				
Dodge.....	135	133	82,089	6,802	.024	.002	.0084	253	22	90.9	14.28	34	4.57				
Door.....	53	53	98,985	5,537	.029	.002	.0089	288	10	51.3	44.50	1.19	4.57				
Douglas.....	2	2															
Dunn.....	93	85															

Eau Claire.....	71	64	188,786	10,739	.016	.0017	.0062	279	11	54.0	18 00	40	5 81
Florence.....	6	2	124,022	63,950	.005	.002	.025	141	3	72.0	42 65	4	5 26
Fond du Lac.....	131	114	242,812	9,963	.008	.0008	.0028	270	20	63.0	14 28	63	3 45
Forest.....	5	2	115,631	15,540	.009	.007	.0073	35	11	23.0	23 40	13	21 06
Grant.....	158	152	585,444	11,282	.02	.001	.0066	545	9	64.2	33 43	1 00	5 12
Green.....	99	80	280,550	21,760	.027	.001	.0036	176	16	50.0	18 68	1 77	4 65
Green Lake.....	49	46	153,794	6,738	.017	.001	.0039	140	14	56.4	18 07	80	3 86
Iowa.....	102	79	182,130	2,300	.022	.0017	.0037	589	6	57.6	15 07	62	5 61
Jacksona.....	56	52	65,334	4,494	.02	.001	.0101	141	5	53.2	50 00	70	4 35
Jefferson.....	85	72	220,539	22,710	.011	.001	.0035	297	15	64.5	18 90	60	3 61
Juneau.....	77	83	348,539	8,760	.034	.003	.0113	687	9	47.1	15 00	1 00	4 13
Kenosha.....	42	30	116,920	40,944	.006	.0015	.0035	112	21	49.0	10 45	1 11	4 75
Kewaunee.....	45	37	113,343	3,350	.017	.001	.0032	213	5	114.0	6 59	41	1 82
La Crosse.....	66	35	189,179	10,918	.014	.0029	.0061	182	22	65.2	9 09	1 86	3 96
La Fayette.....	94	89	487,913	6,155	.022	.0021	.0038	636	18	68.4	16 31	1 50	4 96
Langlade.....	39	13	43,774	3,654	.05	.009	.023	70	15	36 8	44 33	8	08 2
Lincoln.....	18	4	32,495	21,758	.0091	.0015	.0046	157	15	62.7	10 00	32	2 00
Manitowoc.....	69		636,790	9,735	.0066	.0008	.0036	1,048	40	132.0	7 00	48	2 25
Marathon.....	107	88	131,224	7,210	.035	.0019	.011	234	9	64.3	38 61	74	4 69
Marquette.....	16	15	242,137	7,042	.05	.0011	.0056	616	35	111.0	18 00	68	2 49
Milwaukee.....	42	41	115,217	2,631	.024	.0023	.0063	237	20	59.2	8 33	40	2 68
Monroe.....	62	67	385,441	50,583	.015	.0005	.0036	1,337	16	138.2	8 92	60	4 12
Oconto.....	42	31	62,224	2,340	.036	.0024	.0083	219	13	57.1	13 84	61	3 26
Ooutagamie.....	62	62	146,350	6,131	.031	.0044	.0115	209	11	73.9	18 18	95	3 59
Ozaukee.....	116	96	268,500	39,028	.013	.0004	.0048	233	12	73 6	12 46	1 08	3 84
Pepin.....	48	39	225,642	8,338	.02	.004	.0096	356	21	67.4	9 20	1 00	3 16
Pierce.....	89	83	144,843	12,082	.023	.0021	.0075	158	18	55.3	16 66	1 04	3 86
Polk.....	76	66	144,297	4,013	.037	.0024	.0090	128	10	46.5	72 72	1 37	5 57
Portage.....	74	56	38,402	6,347	.022	.004	.0096	166	22	66.5	8 15	50	2 51
Price.....	21												
Racine.....	56	56	221,665	5,154	.027	.001	.0032	238	14	57.3	15 40	1 44	4 48
Richland.....	102	95	89,875	6,219	.021	.0019	.0063	133	19	51.1	9 00	94	3 03
Rock.....	139	112	480,521	18,623	.01	.001	.0031	319	13	47.8	16 16	1 87	5 17
St. Croix.....	85	85	82,745	7,996	.034	.0014	.0074	204	20	54.7	16 21	1 02	5 72
Sauk.....	125	116	216,506	7,231	.023	.002	.0064	391	12	58.0	13 12	90	4 46
Sawyer.....	4												



## FROM THE REPORT OF SUPT. J. B. THAYER, 1890.

## COMMON SCHOOLS.

The two years, since the last report of the department, have been marked by unusual activity on the part of school officers in all portions of the state. The State Superintendent, with the aid of additional clerical help, afforded by recent legislation, has been able to reach county superintendents and other school officers, with circulars of information and inquiries, more effectively than in preceding years. It is doubtful whether any two years in the history of the state have exhibited more interest in all grades of school work, or that more has been accomplished, than during the past two years.

It may be truthfully said that Wisconsin has, theoretically, a complete system of public education, outlined by provisions in the constitution, obtained when the state was organized. It may also be truthfully said that there are inherent defects in the frame work of our rural school system of organization and management, which can be remedied only by an abandonment of the present independent district system, and the reorganization of such districts on the basis of a larger unit for purposes of local taxation and supervision. Excessive and unequal burdens of local taxation, for the support of good schools, the intense conservatism of isolated agricultural communities, cheap teachers, frequent changes, neighborhood quarrels, religious antagonism, race prejudices, and nepotism of members of school boards in the employment of teachers, are hindrances which lie across the pathway of progress, and negative, in a great measure, the best efforts and agencies directed towards the improvement of country schools.

It is a clear conviction, in the mind of the State Superintendent, that the common schools of country districts can never attain, under the present independent system, the standard of excellency and efficiency already attained in the graded schools of cities and villages. There is no phase of the school work in Wisconsin that merits more the thoughtful and care-

ful attention of educators, legislators, and friends of common schools, than the defective, cumbersome, inequitable and wasteful machinery, instituted for the support and management of schools in rural communities.

The economic and educational advantages of the aggregation of the districts of a town, or a similar unit, under a single board of education, have been fully demonstrated by experience in this and in other states, and have been fully set forth in preceding reports of this department.

The comparisons, exhibited in the summaries of statistics, show, that while the amount of work done, estimated by days taught and attendance of pupils, has been slightly increased over the work of the two years covered by the next preceding report, there was a marked improvement in the quality of instruction, estimated from the experience and qualifications of teachers employed; from a better supply of text-books; from a more general introduction of the course of study, resulting in better organization, more systematic work, and more intelligent direction and supervision. Measured by the standard of results which are possible, desirable and attainable, the actual condition is not satisfactory.

### THE TOWNSHIP SYSTEM OF SCHOOLS.

From a paper on "Recent School Legislation in Other States," prepared by Oliver E. Wells, State Superintendent, and read before the Wisconsin State Teachers' Association, at Madison, Wis., December 26, 1893.

The most interesting feature of recent school legislation is the abolition of the independent district system of school government and the substitution for it of the township system. At the last session of the legislature of the state of Maine the district system was abolished, the new township law to take effect March 1, 1894. The Vermont legislature also at its latest session enacted a statute requiring the township system from and after April 1, 1893. New Hampshire adopted the township



system in 1885, Massachusetts in 1882. Rhode Island and Connecticut have the township system, although they have not absolutely abolished the independent district system. Both states are gradually abandoning the district for the township system. Already one half of the population in each state is under that system and each shows annual gains for it. Iowa has a township system though not compulsory and not exclusively in use. Indiana has had a rigorous township system since 1859. In that state all township affairs are managed by a single trustee, and county affairs by three commissioners. The township trustee performs the duties of our town boards as well as of school district officers. He lays out roads, builds bridges, organizes school districts, fixes their boundaries, establishes the sites, builds and equips the schoolhouses, employs the teachers and fixes their compensation. The town trustees choose the county superintendent. The county superintendent, with the town trustees and chairman of the school trustees in incorporated towns and cities, constitute a county board of education, a quasi corporation with limited powers. The Indiana code represents the strongest type of centralized authority which it has been my privilege thus far to study. I am not able to state from personal observation whether it results in a more efficient administration of school affairs or not. The school men assure me that the people are more intensely interested in the choice of their town trustees and county commissioner than in the election of the state and national tickets.

I know from official reports that other states have the township system, but I have not thought it best to speak of states which I have not personally visited. It should not be forgotten in passing that Wisconsin has had a township system for nearly twenty-five years and that is in operation in about sixty towns. Its general adoption has been urged by all the state superintendents and by many county superintendents since the first passage of the law. The latest official reports of the superintendents of important states like New York, New Jersey, and Minnesota contain urgent and eloquent pleas for the adoption of the town system.

The Northeastern Kansas Teachers' Association last spring

adopted the following resolution: "Resolved, That because the independent school district system is responsible for the existing unequal and unjust taxation, which condition gives great irregularity in the length of the school term, and which, also, reduces the wages of teachers so as to prevent the natural and proper growth of the profession, we, therefore, favor the township system of districting and government as a remedy for these evils."

The Michigan State Teachers' Association, now in session at Lansing, has as one of its chief topics of discussion, "The Township Unit System."

#### HOW THE CHANGE TO THE TOWNSHIP SYSTEM IS EFFECTED.

The usual method of procedure in changing from the district to the township system is to constitute each town in the state a single district for school purposes and to abolish the divisions of the town into school districts before existing. They next provide that immediately upon the enactment of such a law the towns shall take possession of all schoolhouses, lands, apparatus and other property owned by the school districts. There is then, at the earliest practicable date, an appraisement by competent persons of the property so taken, and at the first annual assessment thereafter a tax is levied upon the whole town equal to the aggregate appraisement of the several districts, and there is then remitted to the taxpayers of each such district the said appraised valuation of the property so taken. Thus the town practically purchases all the district property of each school district. In the case of joint districts a joint appraisement is made by like officers of the town interested and the remission of taxes is made to each part of the joint district according to the determination of the board.

The corporate powers of a district are continued, so far as they may be necessary, for the purpose of settling its affairs, meeting its liabilities and enforcing its rights, and any property held in trust by any school district by virtue of gift, devise or bequest for the benefit of said district is secured to the district to be held and used according to the terms thereof, the school board of the district of which it forms a part being

made its agent to expend the income of any such trust property that is devoted to the support of the school.

The town board of school directors is constituted a body corporate and given the usual powers of a corporation for public purposes, such as the power to sue and be sued, contracting and being contracted with, holding real and personal property and selling the same.

Permission is given to organize joint districts in cases where natural features prevent the maintenance of efficient sub-districts. Power is given, in some cases to the town at its annual meeting and in other cases to the board of directors, to determine the number and location of its schoolhouses, or to discontinue them or change their location on conditions proper to preserve the just rights and privileges of the inhabitants for whose benefit such districts were originally established.

#### REASONS FOR THE CHANGE IN OTHER STATES.

In New England the change to the town system has been urged upon the ground of a more equitable distribution of the burden of support. The Rhode Island reports show a rate of taxation fourteen times as great in one district as in another, the rate upon one hundred dollars of valuation varying all the way from 2 3-4 cents to 38 1-4 cents. Connecticut shows a similar disproportion.

In the annual report of the state superintendent of New York for 1893, two districts are given for one town in each county, the rate of taxation and the cost per capita for educating children. The rate of taxation varies from 1.2 mills for a single district in Wayne county to 43.1 mills for a district in Colchester county. District No. 6 in the town of De Witt, Onondaga county, has a rate of .9 of a mill, while No. 13 in the same town pays 7 mills. No. 1, town of Pinckney, Lewis county pays 4.8 mills, while No. 10 in the same town pays 37.1 mills. Two districts in the town of Farmersville, Cattaraugus county, pay respectively \$5.66 and \$58.11 per capita; two in South Bristol, Ontario county, \$5.43 and \$60.37 per capita; two in

Northfield, Richmond county, pay respectively \$11.25 per capita and \$181.85. That is to say, the rate of taxation is seven times as great in one district as in another in the same town, and the per capita cost of educating a child is eleven times as great.

#### CONDITIONS IN WISCONSIN.

The assessed value of the districts in Wisconsin varies from \$4,000 or \$5,000 to \$130,000 or \$140,000. There are sixty districts in Wood county, 85 in Juneau, 54 in Adams and 98 in Vernon whose assessed valuation is less than \$25,000. The rate of taxation for school purposes in some districts must therefore be many times as great as in other towns.

It is urged that under the district system too many schools are supported. State Superintendent Luce of Maine in his annual report for 1892, says the average enrollment of pupils last year was less than twenty-five, and that the number of schools having less than the average enrollment was greatly in excess of the number having a large enrollment. He adds, "There are probably between 1,000 and 1,200 existing schools in the state whose enrollment is twelve or less. A careful investigation running through a series of years has shown that between 600 and 800 schools could be abolished without detriment."

In our own state we have 183 districts whose average attendance last year was not more than 5; 858 others not above 10; 2,481 more not exceeding 20. In other words 3,522 country districts, about three fifths of the total number, have an average attendance not exceeding 20, and about two fifths above that average with the great majority near the lower margin.

If these figures are approximately true the adoption of the township system would greatly promote economy. Superintendent Luce says, "Assuming that there are 600 unnecessary schools—and there are neare r 1,000—that it cost per week for each one half the average for all, and that each was kept for the average length of all, there was thus wasted the sum of \$75,276." Following the same method, a careful estimate of the amount of money wasted upon unnecessary schools in Wisconsin is \$190,000.

## ADVANTAGES TO BE GAINED.

More effective administration of school affairs would be secured by reducing the number of officers and increasing their authority and responsibility. The average number of districts to the town throughout the state is about six, although in certain cases the number in a single town exceeds twelve. It is useless to expect eighteen men in each town to give careful attention to district affairs. There is not enough in it. Divided among so many it is petty business. But if all the business of all the districts in the town were placed in the hands of a single board, consisting of five or seven members, there would be enough business of importance to command their time and consideration. With schoolhouses to be built or repaired, supplies to be furnished, six or more teachers to be engaged for the year, the need of provision for advanced instruction in the town to be considered, these and other questions would interest the most capable men in the town. In no other way can many intelligent men be persuaded to serve long upon school boards. Under the present system men will continue to be elected because it is their "turn," or to keep down expenses, or to protect home interests in service and expenditure of money. We now require more than eighteen thousand officers where three thousand would do better.

Under the town system each sub-district would soon find it to its interest to select its best man as representative upon the town school board. Only thus could it hope to secure good school accommodations with proportionate supplies, as long terms with as capable a teacher, and just consideration in the distribution of benefits and the allotment of burdens. Enlightened self-interest would prompt it to continue indefinitely in service, men who had intelligently managed its affairs.

## MORE CONVENIENT SCHOOLHOUSES.

The boundaries of many school districts in their impudent disregard for justice and fair dealing would shame the jagged outlines of any congressional district I ever saw under a political gerrymander. I once knew of a school district in this state which ran irregularly across two townships. Its boundaries

looked as if they had been drawn by chain lightning, upon the surfaces temporarily tilted, and had then been distorted to serve the purposes of private greed. Pupils from remote parts could attend school in their own district by traveling twelve miles over routes upon opposite sides of the townships and passing two schoolhouses upon each route.

Under the township system each family could, within reasonable limits, send its children to the most convenient school. As everyone would pay the school tax into the common town fund, each could ordinarily claim the most accessible school privileges, which are not always furnished by the nearest school.

The town system would mitigate, and, generally, neutralize local feuds and jealousies. Only those who have served in the state department of education can well appreciate the bitterness, vindictiveness, injustice, the incalculable and irreparable injury resulting from neighborhood strife. The successful faction locates the schoolhouse where it will be least convenient for the opposite faction, perhaps where it will be inaccessible to many pupils, refuses adequate accommodations for a majority of the patrons, hires the most incompetent person obtainable, particularly if such person is related to their party or is especially obnoxious to the defeated party, denies a hearing upon lawful petitions for redress of grievances, and through the children works the trouble into the school and destroys its influence. With a town board, the majority of whose members would be remote from the scene of contention, the single possible representative of a faction could have little influence. He would generally be told that the board could not be a party to local contests and that the schools must be protected from them.

#### MAKE THE BETTER SCHOOLS THE STANDARD.

It is believed that the adoption of the township system would make the schools of the most intelligent and progressive districts the standard. A town having practically paid for all schoolhouses and being responsible for the construction of needed ones, the demand from any sub-district would be for a

schoolhouse equal to the best in the town. The claim for it would be based upon the justice of their having equal accommodations, since they pay the same rate of taxation upon their property. They would further demand an equal equipment and as good a teacher as any district had, with as long a term. The result would be that all sub-districts would have good schoolhouses, well equipped, with longer terms of schooling and under more competent teachers.

The natural tendency of contracting with the same board would be to contract for an entire year, and thus the term of employment of individual teachers would generally be increased. The schools being better equipped and better taught would attract and hold the pupils, and their attendance in suitable buildings, properly ventilated and kept, with suitable surroundings, would result in more manly and orderly pupils. Thus school advantages and expenses would be equalized. A more equitable apportionment of public funds would be secured under our laws, the distribution of local taxation being equalized. There would also be greater disinterestedness and impartiality in the employment of teachers, competency not kinship or favoritism becoming the basis of selection.

Opportunity would be given for the selection of uniform text-books for all the schools in the town and for furnishing them to the schools at the lowest possible cost.

#### BETTER SUPERVISION.

Our present township law practically makes the secretary of the school board a town superintendent. It requires him to organize and grade the schools and to assist the teachers in classifying and arranging them. He must also visit each school in the town at least twice during each term, consult with and advise the teachers in regard to the methods of instruction and government, and report to the board such measures for the improvement of the schools as his experience and observation shall dictate. This arrangement makes easy co-operation between the county superintendent and the town board in the supervision of the schools. It will not be diffi-

cult for the county superintendent to meet the board at suitable times for consultation and advice regarding better administration and to visit the schools in company with the secretary.

The proper grading and classifying of the schools being required by statute, the adoption of proper courses of study and fidelity to them, would be insured. For fifteen years a persistent effort has been made to secure the general adoption of a course of study, and many thousand dollars have been expended in the publication of courses. The Manual has gone through seven editions. Ten thousand copies of the sixth edition were published in 1890, and fifteen thousand copies of the seventh edition in 1891. The supply of Manuals is exhausted, and another edition will be prepared and put into circulation during the coming year. The universal adoption of the township system would afford some hope of tracing benefits in some degree commensurate with the large expenditure for the publication and distribution of the course of study.

#### EXPERIENCE PROVES ITS VALUE.

It is not contended that the mere adoption of the township system would secure good schools. A system of schools is not a self-operating, self-directing institution. It requires constant, vigilant and intelligent management to make it effective. Under our form of government no community can have, nor does it deserve, better government than it secures by its own voluntary action. The contention here is that there are many and great evils inherent in the district system, which are not necessarily or properly a part of the township system. The universal testimony of all communities which have changed from the district to the township system establishes to the fullest extent the claims made for the latter system by its friends before its adoption. The management of local affairs still remains with the patrons of the school, each community electing its representative upon the board, and the whole town voting upon the expenditure of money and the furnishing of schoolhouses and supplies. The advantage of the change will be decidedly with the rural communities,



since the villages and cities now maintain nine or ten months' school in buildings better constructed and equipped. Circumstances naturally prevent any considerable extension of this amount of schooling, but a considerable extension is both possible and desirable in the district schools. In New Hampshire, where no minimum requirement of schooling is demanded as a prerequisite for the apportionment of public moneys, the average amount of schooling in the rural districts was nineteen and a fraction weeks. The change to the township system went into effect in 1886, and the average number of weeks of school in the rural districts last year was twenty-four and a fraction weeks. In other words, the change from the district to the township system has increased the number of weeks of school in the country districts about 25 per cent. in seven years. As before stated, the intelligent and progressive districts will set the pace. Since all are equally taxed for school purposes, all will demand equal advantages, including length of term. Thus the gains will be almost wholly with the country schools.

#### EQUALIZATION OF ADVANTAGES.

An equalization of advantages can hardly be expected without inconvenience. The richer districts must naturally make some concessions involving a trifling increase of expenditure for school purposes. They certainly cannot, with any degree of fairness, maintain that they ought to have superior advantages at less cost than their more unfortunate neighbors. The crushing burden of taxation will be somewhat alleviated in the poorer districts, while an increase of school advantages will be gained. This application of the principle of fair play cannot consistently be objected to by the well-to-do classes. If the oft repeated assertion of the dependence of the perpetuity of American institutions upon universal education has any significance, respect for the common welfare necessitates a readjustment of burdens and an equalization of benefits.

Opposition to change of administration is natural, but no more significant in an effort to improve the public school sys-

tem than to secure improvement in agencies affecting the common weal. The agricultural class is perhaps least likely to look with favor upon a change, yet within the memory of many still in the vigor of manhood the farmers have discarded the sickle for the cradle and that for the hand-rake reaper, which in turn was succeeded by the Marsh harvester and the self-binder. Similar improvement has been made in the implements for threshing and cleaning grain. Since the farmers have not been averse to improvement in farm implements, it is to be expected that improvements in school management and a more equitable distribution of their advantages and the cost of their maintenance will be as heartily and rapidly welcomed and adopted.

## FREE HIGH SCHOOLS.

Section 46. This section is a more definite statement of the law conferring authority upon municipalities to establish free high schools. The two classes of high schools are more distinctly defined. There is added a limitation upon the number of such schools that may be established in one municipality. A few cities in this state are composed of independent school districts. There are two or more districts in each of those cities. To allow the establishment of more than two free high schools within one city would work an injustice to cities of equal size that constitute but one school district and are allowed state aid for but one free high school.

Section 47. There is no material change in the present law made by this section.

Section 48. The language is simplified and made to conform to the township system of school government.

Section 49. This section constitutes every high school district a corporation with the powers necessary to accomplish the purposes of its organization. The name by which such corporation shall be known is also designated. This is new. Its necessity had been suggested by the supreme court of this state. In the administration of the law relating to high schools many difficulties have been encountered, owing to uncertainty as to the present legal character of such districts. See 77 Wis., 532.

Section 50. This section is a revision of the present law in the language employed. The only material change constitutes the town treasurer *ex officio* the treasurer of the free high school district established in districts under the township system. This arrangement avoids the establishment of a new office, and makes the safety of the high school funds as secure as those of the town.

Section 51. No change in the present law is embodied in this section except that contained in the last sentence. The present law is restated in a more definite form. No new pow-

ers are conferred upon school boards. The last clause makes it the duty of school boards to comply with the laws of the state in maintaining high schools until the district is dissolved by vote of the people.

Section 52. Provision is made in this section for the making of reports of high schools not located in cities. Provision is also made for special reports directly to the state superintendent. As these schools come under his supervision and are inspected under his direction, occasional reports on special features of their management are essential to his intelligent action.

Section 53. This section provides for the formation of joint high school districts and for their dissolution. Our present law does not afford any means whereby such districts may be dissolved. Several cases have demonstrated the need of such provision.

Section 54. This is an entirely new provision. There are strong reasons in support of it. High schools are organized pursuant to a vote of the people of the district. Their continuance should be subject to the will of the same authority. No community should be forced to give a reluctant support to a high school.

Section 55. The length of the annual term is increased by this section from three to six months, and the annual appropriation is increased from twenty-five to fifty thousand dollars. The present appropriation to each school has become so small that it barely suffices as an inducement to cities to continue their schools under state supervision. The increase contemplated will operate to strengthen the entire system and insure permanence.

Section 56. The length of term for this class of schools is increased by one month, the appropriation remains the same.

Section 57. The only change wrought by this section is the provision for joint high school districts which is rendered necessary by the existence of such districts.

Section 58. This section consists of a brief and definite statement of the present law.

Section 59. This section supplies a defect in existing laws

by defining the legal qualification of assistants and providing the means by which such qualification may be obtained. As the greater part of high school instruction is given by assistants, their equipment is an essential consideration.

## COUNTY SUPERINTENDENTS.

Section 60. This section requires an official bond of the county superintendent. The law in its present form makes the county superintendent liable to any town in his district for pecuniary losses resulting from his negligence, but provides no means for its enforcement against irresponsible parties. This provision is designed to remedy this defect.

Section 61. This section is entirely new. It prescribes legal qualifications for holding the office of county superintendent. The law is severe in its requirements relating to the qualifications of teachers in all grades of the public schools and visits upon districts the forfeiture of their state money for hiring teachers who do not possess the required evidence of legal qualification. It is consistent with sound sense that similar requirements be exacted of officers who are to pass judgment upon the competency of teachers and issue to them certificates of qualification. County superintendents are charged with the duty of advising with and directing the work of teachers within their respective jurisdictions. It is manifest that candidates for the office of superintendent of schools should possess certificates equivalent to the highest grade they are called upon to issue. In the matter of the removal of F. A. Strupp, Superintendent of schools for Marathon County, Hon. Chas. V. Bardeen, Judge of the Sixteenth Circuit of Wisconsin held that "want of sufficient educational acquirements" constituted "incompetency" within the meaning of the statute sufficient to justify removal from office.

Section 62. Under subdivision 2 of this section the county Superintendent is required to make a report of his official visits to the secretary of the board of directors. This require-

ment will create a closer relation between the chief school officer in each county and the local authority in each town. Such reports will materially aid boards of directors in the management of the schools under their charge.

Subdivision 3 is entirely new. The meetings contemplated will be effectual in creating a deeper interest in school work on the part of school officers and will lead to more intelligent management on their part. They will also afford superintendents greater opportunity to systematize and strengthen the work of all the schools under their care.

Sub-division 4 supplies a much needed requirement. At present a superintendent in a majority of cases enters upon the duties of his office without a line of record to inform him concerning the items specified in this subdivision. The permanent records for which the clause provides will furnish an incoming superintendent with information necessary to the intelligent discharge of his duties.

Subdivision 5. The superintendent's powers are enlarged by this subdivision to the extent of ordering improvements to an amount not to exceed fifty dollars instead of twenty-five dollars as the present law provides. Experience shows that in some cases twenty-five dollars is inadequate to remove nuisances and make necessary improvements. In subdivision 6 the law is so modified as to impose the entire responsibility for condemning schoolhouses upon county superintendents. Under the present law the responsibility is shared by town chairmen. The administration of our present law is unsatisfactory and furnishes strong reasons for placing the entire responsibility upon the principal school officer. The opportunity to appeal from the superintendent's order excludes the probability of unfairness in his decisions. In subdivision 8, a very slight change is introduced consisting of the requirement relating to reporting the names of boards of directors to the State Superintendent. Subdivision 11 embraces the substance of Ch. 65, laws 1885.

Section 63. This section embraces Ch. 215, laws 1885, and Ch. 80, laws 1887. The purpose and intent of the law are amination in it unnecessary for the higher grades of certification; the language alone is changed.

Section 64. This section is entirely new and is framed in the interest of competent and effective school supervision. The present law is defective in that a superintendent's responsibility for good work is not specifically provided for. This leads to a frequent neglect of the duties charged upon this officer to such an extent as to degrade the importance of the office in public estimation. Public school interests are greatly impaired in consequence of such incompetent and indifferent supervision. The enactment of this section into law can in no way affect superintendents who properly perform the work which the acceptance of the office imposes upon them.

Section 65. This section is changed by the addition of "immoral conduct" to the causes for the removal of superintendents from office. The obvious need of good moral conduct in the practices of the principal school officer in a county justifies the insertion of this enumeration of immorality among the causes for removal.

### EXAMINATION AND CERTIFICATES.

There is no material change in sections 66 and 67. Under section 68 English literature is substituted for physiology in the requirements made of applicants for the second grade certificate and general history is substituted for higher algebra and solid geometry in the branches required for the first grade certificate. These changes are based upon the class work required of teachers. Physiology was placed among the third grade branches several years ago, which rendered a second ex-cates. More emphasis is now placed upon the study of English in our common schools than formerly, hence the demand for a more thorough preparation in literature on the part of teachers. Our present laws overload the examination for a first grade certificate with mathematics to the exclusion of studies that give general information. The scope of the examination in mathematics is equivalent to the present requirements in this branch for the life state certificate, exceeding by far the necessities for competent instruction in mathematics in our common schools. The substitution of gen-

eral history for higher algebra will therefore prove beneficial. Besides these changes the language of this section is made more concise than in the present law. The same is true with reference to section 69.

Section 72 contains material changes. At present the duties of the state board of examiners are limited to the examination of applicants for the limited and unlimited state certificates. The change enlarges these duties by investing the board with authority to determine the diplomas granted by colleges and normal schools located without this state, that may be countersigned by the state superintendent and made state certificates. This board is required also, to determine what state certificates shall be deemed equivalent to the Wisconsin state certificates.

Section 73. Botany is placed among the studies required for the limited state certificate. This certificate qualifies to teach high schools having three year courses. As these courses include the study of botany, the change is necessary. The addition of English literature and general history to the studies embraced in the examination for the first grade county certificate renders unnecessary their enumeration under the requirements for either state certificate.

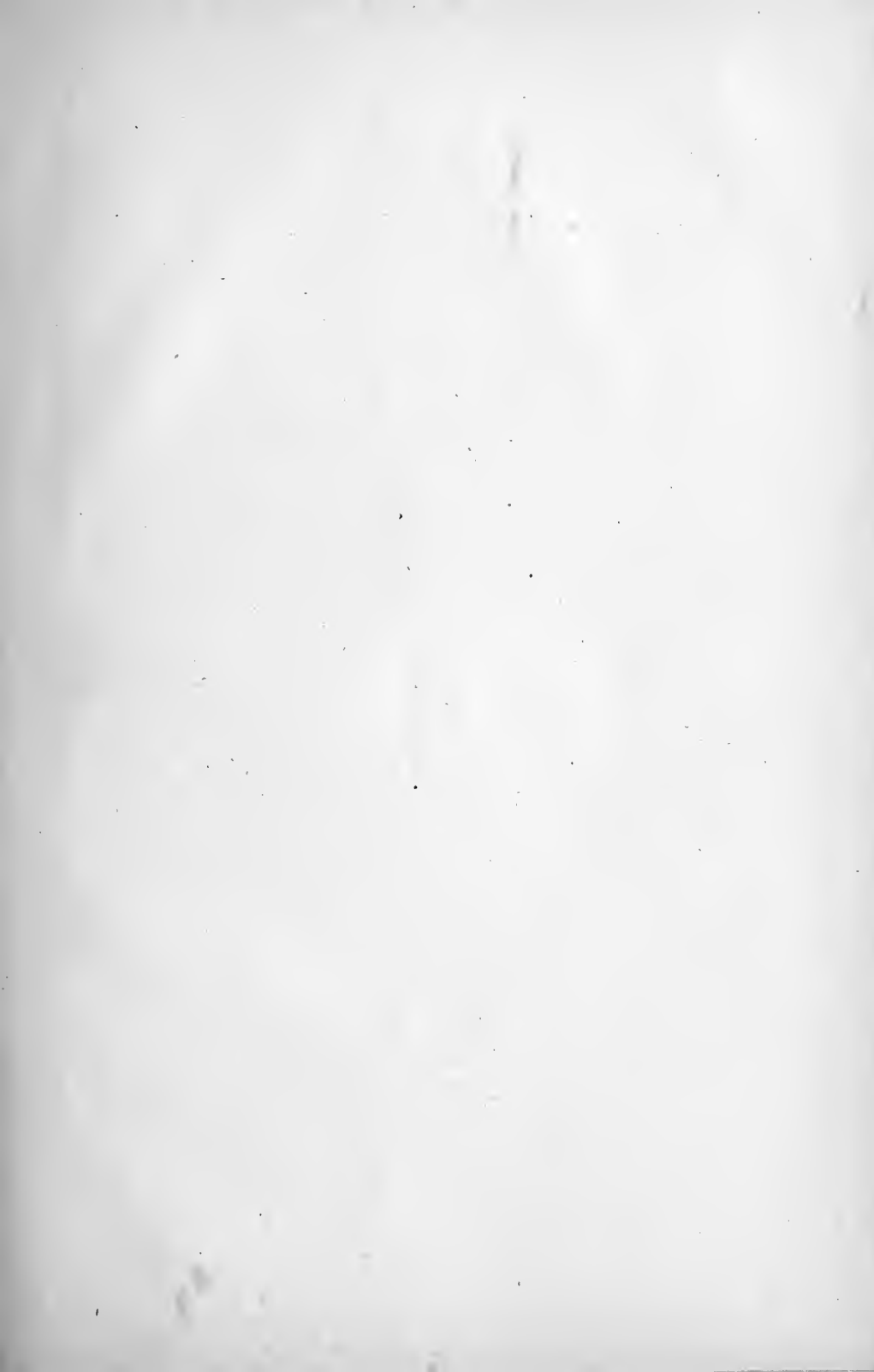
Section 74. The change in this section is rendered necessary by the change discussed above, which places upon the state board of examiners the duty of judging the merits of certificates granted in other states when their owners desire to teach in this state.

Section 75. There is no change in the law; the language used is more clear and concise.

Section 76. This section vests in the state board of examiners the authority now exercised by the state superintendent to determine what diplomas granted by state and foreign colleges and foreign normal schools shall be made equivalent to Wisconsin state certificates. At present diplomas granted by foreign state normal schools are not countersigned. The reason for this change is stated briefly above.

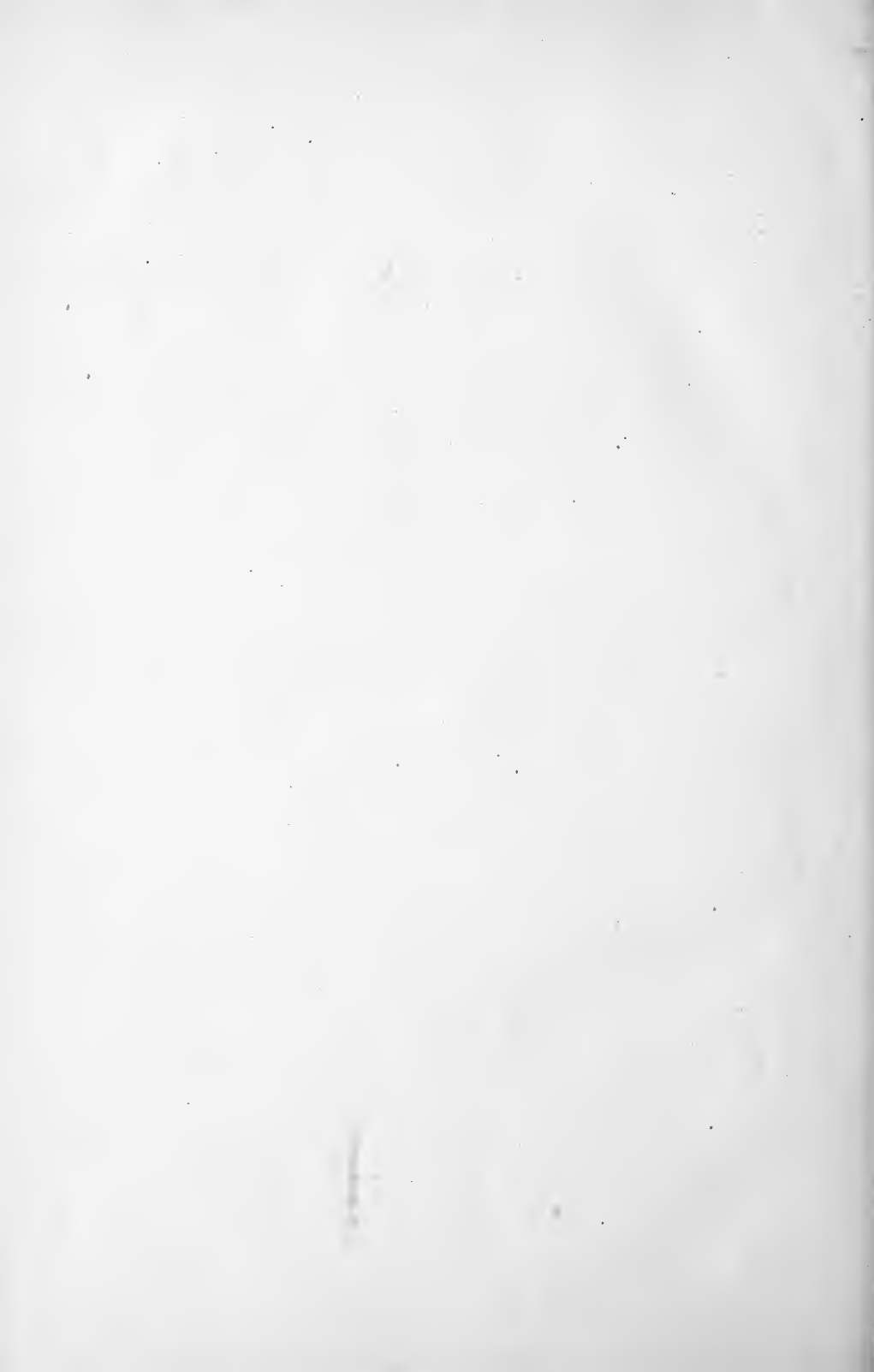
Sections 77 and 78. These sections embody the present law.













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